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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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UNFILTERED

"I want this government to be criticised. Criticism makes democracy strong.

—Narendra Modi,
PM, in April 2018

It's gloves off! Oppn says no to delimitation

DMK announces black flag protest as Parl Session on Women's quota starts today

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and others during INDIA bloc meeting at Kharge's residence in New Delhi on Wednesday —PTI

CHENNAI/NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Opposition parties on Wednesday questioned the BJP-led NDA government over the proposed delimitation exercise, expressing concern that the move could impact the interests of southern states, with non-BJP Chief Ministers joining forces to oppose it.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said in Delhi that opposition parties had decided to vote unitedly against the delimitation-related provisions in the Constitution Amendment Bill in Parliament. He clarified that while parties support women's reservation, they object to the manner in which the legislation is being introduced.

"It is politically motivated... just to gag and suppress opposition parties," Kharge said adding that the government is "playing tricks with delimitation".

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu announced a statewide black flag protest on 16 April, coinciding with a special parliamentary session expected to take up amendments to the Women's Reservation Act and delimitation proposals. Chief Minister MK Stalin opposed the exercise, warning that it could severely harm southern states.

Stalin said he had convened an emergency meeting with party MPs and district secretaries and was coordinating with leaders across states to build a joint response. He described the proposed amendment as a "massive, historic injustice" against Tamil Nadu and other southern states.

Calling the situation alarming, Stalin said, "The sword that hung over our heads has now descended upon us." He further questioned whether the exercise amounted to punishment for southern states contributing significantly to India's development.

He said the delimitation proposal raised concerns about federal balance and representation, asking whether Tamil Nadu and the South were being "repaid" for their progress with reduced political weight.

Meanwhile, the constitutional framework governing delimitation allows Parliament to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census under Article 82. This is followed by the setting up of a high-powered, independent Delimitation Commission, whose orders cannot be challenged in court.

Opposition leaders also criticised the timing of the special session and the lack of consensus. —PTI

>>>More on Page 3

THE DELIMITATION DILEMMA

THE CENTRE HAS UNVEILED A 3-BILL LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE AMID MUCH OPPOSITION. THESE ARE:

1. The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026
2. The Delimitation Bill, 2026
3. The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026

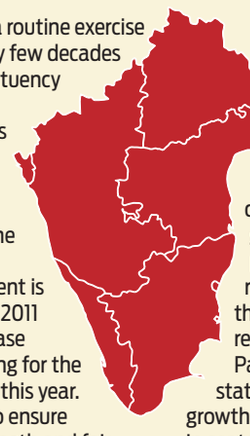
THE OBJECTIVE?

These aim to restart the delimitation process, operationalise one-third reservation for women in Parliament and readjust the Lok Sabha strength, which it proposes to increase from 543 to 850 seats. Of these, 815 seats will be for states and 35 for Union Territories.

WHAT IS DELIMITATION AND WHY ARE SOUTHERN STATES PROTESTING?

Delimitation is a routine exercise carried out every few decades to redraw constituency boundaries and create new seats based on population. It is set to be conducted for the fifth time.

The government is likely to use the 2011 Census as the base instead of waiting for the ongoing Census this year. The process is to ensure equal voter strength and fair representation by adjusting boundaries based on demographics. However, Southern states, which have successfully controlled population growth, fear that a population-based reallocation will reduce their political representation in the Parliament, while Northern states with higher population growth will see a huge increase in seats. The bottom line being, Southern states will be "punished for being efficient".



TAKE A LOOK AT THE 12 MOST POPULOUS STATES IN 2011 CENSUS

1.	Uttar Pradesh	19.98 cr
2.	Maharashtra	11.24 cr
3.	Bihar	10.41 cr
4.	West Bengal	9.13 cr
5.	Andhra Pradesh	8.46 cr
6.	Madhya Pradesh	7.26 cr
7.	Tamil Nadu	7.21 cr
8.	Rajasthan	6.86 cr
9.	Karnataka	6.11 cr
10.	Gujarat	6.04 cr
11.	Odisha	4.20 cr
12.	Kerala	3.34 cr

AND HERE ARE THE LARGEST 12 STATES

1. Rajasthan
2. Madhya Pradesh
3. Maharashtra
4. Uttar Pradesh
5. Gujarat
6. Karnataka
7. Andhra Pradesh
8. Odisha
9. Chhattisgarh
10. Tamil Nadu
11. Telangana
12. Bihar

Bengaluru Census phase 1 begins today

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has announced that Phase I of the National Census will begin on April 16, 2026. Authorized enumerators and officials will visit apartment complexes to collect household and demographic data. Residents, property owners, and associations are urged to cooperate, provide accurate information, and allow access to premises. Furnishing details is mandatory under the Census Act, 1948, and refusal or obstruction may invite penal action, the GBA Commissioner said. —SALAR NEWS

HC orders take down of Kejri's court clips

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The Delhi High Court has directed police to remove all unauthorised videos circulating on social media showing APP Chief Arvind Kejriwal arguing before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma during a hearing on 13 April, 2026, in the Delhi Excise Policy case. The videos show Kejriwal's in-person appearance while seeking the judge's recusal. The court said unauthorised recording is prohibited under its video conferencing rules and the Electronic Evidence and Video Rules, 2025.—PTI

>>>MORE ON PAGE 4

CBSE records 93.7% pass percentage in Class 10 results

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

More than 93.70 per cent students cleared Class 10 board exams with over 55,000 scoring above 95 per cent marks, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced on Wednesday. Over 2.20 lakh candidates have scored above 91 per cent marks. Girls outshone boys yet again with 94.99 per cent of them clearing the exam. This is 1.3 percentage points higher than the pass percentage of boys which stood at 92.69 per cent. Yrivandrum and Vijaywada recorded the highest pass percentage.—PTI

WB CM alleges car check by central forces near airport

ISLAMPUR, 15 APRIL

A day after the TMC alleged that the Election Commission had ordered "intrusive checks" of vehicles of its leaders, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday claimed that central forces tried to search her car when she was travelling to Kolkata airport earlier in the day. Addressing a poll rally here in Uttar Dinajpur district, Banerjee also accused central ministers of "bringing in money" to the poll-bound state and "misusing their positions".—PTI

>>>MORE ON PAGE 3

DAVANAGERE BYPOLLS

Cong suspends MLC Jabbar for anti-party act

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Karnataka Congress President DK Shivakumar on Wednesday suspended MLC K Abdul Jabbar from the primary membership of the party for "anti-party activities" during the Davanagere South Assembly bypoll.

On Sunday, Shivakumar had accepted Jabbar's resignation as Chairman of the party's Minority Department and dissolved committees under him. The action followed allegations by a section of Muslim leaders of an internal "conspiracy" to defeat the official Congress candidate in 9 April bypoll.

Jabbar had sought the party ticket from Davanagere South, but the Congress fielded Samarth Mallikarjun, grandson of late MLA Shamanur Shivashankarappa, whose death necessitated the election.

Jabbar said Shivakumar must explain the decision and clarify where he violated discipline, adding that he would respond in detail later. He maintained that he had done nothing wrong and had resigned as minority department president after feeling he was not taken into confidence by senior leaders and the constituency's political family, including Minister SS Mallikarjun, his wife MP Prabha Mallikarjun, and other local leaders.

He also said he stayed away from campaigning due to ill health.

Earlier, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had also removed MLC Naseer Ahmed as political secretary over similar allegations of indiscipline.

The row has exposed divisions within the Congress after minority leaders accused some senior figures of working against the official candidate. Though no names were formally mentioned, party sources pointed to Jabbar, Naseer Ahmed and Housing Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan.

With action already taken against Jabbar and Naseer Ahmed, speculation is mounting that Khan could also face disciplinary action —PTI

COURT FINDS CONG MLA GUILTY IN 2016 MURDER OF DHARWAD BJP LEADER

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

A Special Court for MPs and MLAs on Wednesday found Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni guilty in the 2016 murder of BJP leader Yogesh Gowda. Along with Kulkarni, 16 others were convicted, while two accused were acquitted by Judge Santhosh Gajanan Bhat. The court will deliver the sentence on Thursday.

Gowda, a former Dharwad ZP member, was hacked to death at his gymnasium in Dharwad on 15 June, 2016. Kulkarni is accused of conspiracy in the murder when he was a minister. The case transferred to the CBI in 2019 during the BJP government's tenure. The CBI has recorded statements from 113 witnesses and arrested Kulkarni in 2020. He spent nine months in jail before being granted bail by the Supreme Court. —PTI

All sectors must have menstrual leave: HC

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Karnataka High Court on Wednesday directed the State government to ensure strict implementation of its menstrual leave policy across both organised and unorganised sectors.

The order in Chandravva Hanamant Gokavi v. State of Karnataka came on a petition filed by a woman working in a hotel, who said her job involved physical strain and poor workplace conditions, and that the policy was not being properly enforced, according to Bar and Bench.

The policy, notified in December 2025, provides one paid leave per month to women employees aged 18 to 52. The court, led by Justice M Nagaprasanna, held that the State must ensure its implementation in all sectors, including the unorganised workforce, and not restrict it to formal employment alone.

The court observed that while men and women are equal in law, biological differences justify special protections. It held that menstrual leave is not a privilege but a

matter of dignity, fairness and recognition of lived realities. The bench also stated that such measures strengthen the constitutional guarantees of the right to life and equality, and cautioned the State against being deterred by "misplaced" interpretations of Article 14.

The court noted that the State legislature is already considering a related Bill and referred to similar laws in other jurisdictions, affirming that menstrual leave is rooted in constitutional rights. It directed the government to ensure benefits reach the unorganised sector and continue implementation pending formal legislation, after which rules must be framed without delay. —Agencies

Girl dies as car rams into procession

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 15 APRIL

A seven-year-old girl was killed and nine others injured after a speeding car rammed into a procession held for Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations in Bilekallu village on Tuesday night.

The deceased, Sanvi, 7, of Indavara village, died on the spot. Chikkamagaluru Additional SP Jayakumar said the driver lost control of the vehicle, which veered into the crowd and overturned.

Nine injured, including Nishchith, 11; Trupthi, 11; Thimmaraju, 45; Usha, 22; Srushti, 18; Nagaraju, 28; and Chetan, 16; have been shifted to Hassan Government Hospital.

The driver, Sudhakar, was also admitted to hospital. Tensions flared when police tried to shift him to a private hospital in Hassan, prompting locals to block the ambulance, alleging preferential treatment.

Villagers alleged the driver was intoxicated, while another occupant reportedly fled. Police said blood samples have been sent for testing. —Salar News

GUJARAT HC ISSUES NOTICES TO META, X, GOOGLE OVER AI MISUSE

AHMEDABAD, 15 APRIL

The Gujarat High Court has issued notices to Meta India, Google, X, Reddit, and Scribd regarding a PIL seeking a strong regulatory framework to prevent the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) in creating and circulating deepfake videos and images. The notices, returnable by 8 May, also directed the respondents to ensure they are integrated into the Sahyog portal for coordinated, swift takedown of unlawful content, in accordance with the IT Act, 2000.

The court noted that "Effective and meaningful responses/action of the respondent intermediaries will be key to the due diligence obligations enforced upon them under the statutory framework." The central and Gujarat governments informed the court about delays, procedural issues, and non-compliance by certain tech platforms.

In October 2024, the government launched the Sahyog portal to facilitate immediate action against unlawful content, bringing law enforcement and intermediaries together. The Ministry of Home Affairs said that while Meta and Google have improved compliance speed, others, including X, have not, despite intimations. —PTI

DEPARTED FROM B'DESH

250, including Rohingyas, missing after boat sinks in Andaman Sea

DHAKA, 15 APRIL

At least 250 people, including Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals, are missing after a boat capsized in the Andaman Sea while en route to Malaysia, according to the United Nations refugee and migration agencies.

The trawler is believed to have departed from Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district carrying a large number of passengers. The UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration said overcrowding, strong winds and rough seas likely caused the vessel to lose control and sink.

Bangladesh Coast Guard spokesperson Lt Commander Sabbir Alam Suzan said nine people — three Rohingya and six Bangladeshis — were rescued on 9 April by the Bangladesh-flagged vessel MT Meghna Pride.

Another coast guard official said the survivors, eight men and one woman, were later handed over to authorities in Teknaf. He clarified the rescue was not part of a formal search operation, as the incident occurred outside Bangladesh's waters.

The exact time of the sinking and details of any ongoing search efforts remain unclear.

The UN agencies said the tragedy reflects the prolonged displacement of Rohingya people and the lack of durable solutions.

Ongoing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state, coupled with limited aid, continues to push refugees towards dangerous sea journeys. —PTI

— FB

Bypoll results won't affect CM's chair: Yathindra

MYSURU, 15 APRIL

Congress MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said his father Siddaramaiah will complete his full five years term as the Chief Minister and the results of the bypolls in Davangere South and Bagalkot will not have any impact. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru on Wednesday, Yathindra said that the High Command will decide on a potential Cabinet reshuffle as several legislators went to New Delhi to press upon the leadership for a ministerial position. Yathindra also hit back at JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy for making "hit and run" statements claiming that Siddaramaiah indulged in nepotism. Yatindra said that Kumaraswamy made his son Nikhil Kumaraswamy the JD(S)' Youth President, while Siddaramaiah did not indulge in such politics. Yathindra said that he entered into politics to fill into the shoes of his father, following the death of his brother. —*SALAR NEWS*

IIM(B) to host conference on aviation on 18 April

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Indian Institute of Management Bangalore is set to host the ninth edition of International Conference on Future of Aviation and Aerospace (FOAA) on 18 April in partnership with TBS Education, bringing together global industry leaders, researchers and academicians. The day-long event is part of a joint initiative to deliver a General Management Programme for Aviation and Aerospace Executives, addressing rising demand for sector-specific managerial talent. The conference will feature discussions on market potential, design and manufacturing, airport infrastructure, and talent development. Speakers include Annett Baessler, Belson Coutinho, Sunil Bhaskaran, and Kota Harinarayana. A concluding session on AI and analytics in aviation will feature experts from GE Aerospace and Fortinet, which will be followed by an alumni event for networking. —*PTI*

PM urges citizens to take 9 pledges

Modi inaugurates Mandya temple, highlights welfare measures in Mutts

MANDYA, 15 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday appealed to people to take nine pledges, ranging from water conservation, natural farming, to fitness and service.

Modi said his first request is about water conservation and better water management, followed by appeals for tree plantation under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' (One tree in the name of mother) campaign, cleanliness in public and religious places, strengthening local products through "Vocal for Local," promoting domestic tourism, adopting chemical-free natural farming, encouraging healthy eating with millets and reduced oil consumption.

Modi also urged people to embrace yoga and fitness, and to nurture service.

"If we move forward with honesty and determination on these nine resolutions, we can progress to a developed Karnataka and India," he said while addressing an event organised to inaugurate Sri Guru Bhairavaikya Mandira at Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt in Mandya.

The Mandira is a memorial dedicated to the revered seer, Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswami, the 71st Pontiff of the Mutt, revered by the Vokkaliga community.

Ahead of the inauguration of 'Mandira', Modi also visited Jwala Peeta – where Lord Shiva is believed to have resided -- and also Sri Kalabhairaveshwara Swamy temple.

"I often say that Karnataka is rich in both Tattva-Jnana (philosophical wisdom) and Tantra-Jnana (technological knowledge), meaning both the depth of philosophy and the strength of technology are present here," he said.

Modi also released a book titled 'Saundarya Lahari and Shiva Mahimna Stotram' along with former prime minister and JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda.

He praised the role of the monastery in guiding society through spirituality. Referring to the lineage of seers, he said, Balagangadharanatha Mahaswami had elevated the institution's legacy, while Nirmalanandanatha Mahaswami is carrying it forward with renewed energy.

He highlighted the late seer's contributions to education and healthcare, noting that hundreds of institutions established under his guidance.

"Swami ji believed quality healthcare should not be a privilege of a few, but must reach every citizen," Modi said, drawing parallels with initiatives like Ayushman Bharat which enabled free treatment for crores of citizens. Referring to Mandya as "Shakkare Nagara," he praised the region's agricultural richness and the people's warmth. —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was received by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at HAL Airport in Bengaluru on Wednesday —*SALAR NEWS*

CM flags delays in release of funds

Siddaramaiah seeks intervention on 18 issues & Rs 6,000 cr for Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention on 18 issues, demand to give Constitutional protection to the State's 56 per cent reservation policy and release of deficit grants.

Siddaramaiah said that recurring delays from the Centre "created a perception of systemic inequity", in the letter handed over to Modi when the PM arrived at the City's HAL airport.

"The people of Karnataka look forward to your kind intervention in resolving these issues," he wrote.

Siddaramaiah said that Karnataka is among the largest contributors to the national exchequer and a leader in socioeconomic development, but Karnataka is yet to receive grants of Rs 2,860 crore for FY 2025-26 under the 15th Finance Commission Grants to Gram Panchayats.

The CM also sought release of Rs 17,554 crore pending central funds and resolution of policy issues, including support for retrofitting and augmentation schemes, to ensure universal access to safe drinking water under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

Siddaramaiah pressed for approval of major infrastructure projects, including the Bengaluru-Mysuru high-speed rail, and the Bengaluru-Mumbai High-Speed Rail Corridor. He cited the delay in the railway coach factory in Kolar despite the State offering 1,123 acres of land.

Siddaramaiah noted that the State had not received any major National Highway projects in 12 years and sought the implementation of pending projects.

He urged the PM to direct the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Central Water Commission to expedite the appraisal and approval of the Mekedatu Project, envisaging 67 TMC storage for Bengaluru's drinking water, regulated releases to Tamil Nadu, and 400 MW hydropower, in line with the Supreme Court's judgment.

Siddaramaiah further demanded national project status and funding support for irrigation projects such as Rs 5,300 crore Central Assistance for Upper Bhadra and Upper Krishna (Stage III), along with notification of the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II award.

He also urged wildlife clearance for the Kalasa Nala Diversion Project, enabling the diversion of 1.72 TMC of water for drinking purposes under the Mahadayi Tribunal Award.

He also demanded a special grant for Bengaluru to the tune of Rs 6,000 crore, annual support of Rs 5,000 crore for Kalyana Karnataka's development under Article 371(J), and the establishment of an AIIMS in Raichur. —*PTI*

Won't allow marginalisation from delimitation: DKS

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said the proposed delimitation exercise based on the pre-2026 Census will reduce the voice of Southern states.

He said on X on Wednesday the that Congress party and its allies would not allow the Centre to "politically marginalise" the South.

Shivakumar said the Centre is attempting a political re-engineering.

> **I urge the Centre to not hide behind women's empowerment to push a deeply unfair political agenda. Rushing a massive restructuring of India's democracy during elections, without transparency, is unacceptable.**
>
> —DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

"The proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850 will systematically reduce the voice of the South, while rewarding unchecked population growth elsewhere.

This is nothing but punishing progress and good governance," he wrote.

CONG SUPPORTS WOMEN'S RESERVATION

Shivakumar made it clear that his party is not against Women's Reservation in the legislature, but the Centre should not hide behind it and carry out their "deeply unfair political agenda".

"Congress fully supports Women's Reservation. In fact, it was (Congress leader) Sonia Gandhi's vision and commitment that brought this dream to the national agenda. We demand that it be implemented without linking it to delimitation or seat expansion," he wrote.

"I urge the Centre to not hide behind women's empowerment to push a deeply unfair agenda... India's strength lies in balance not in domination," Shivakumar added. —ANI

HC refuses to ban tiger safaris, orders clear demarcation

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday declined an immediate ban on tiger safaris in the State.

However, it directed the State government to file a reply to the plea seeking a permanent ban on tiger safaris within critical tiger habitats. The HC bench a further sought an affidavit clarifying the demarcation of core, buffer and tourism zones, the exact locations where safaris are being conducted and maps indicating these zones, according to Bar and Bench.

The State government had briefly banned safaris after a spate of human-animal conflicts resulting in deaths near the fringes of the tiger reserves forests such as Bandipur and Nagarhole. The government said that increased activities was causing animals to attacks humans. The government slowly allowed a phased renewal of safaris.

The petitioner claimed that safaris are happening in critical tiger habitats, where such activities are prohibited. However, the court rejected the claims and said that tiger reserves comprise core, buffer and tourism zones. The bench observed that safaris are generally allowed only in buffer or designated tourism zones, not in strictly protected core areas. —*Agencies*

Realtor shot dead in Vijayapura over property dispute

VIJAYAPURA, 15 APRIL

A 48-year-old realtor was shot dead after assailants rammed his vehicle and opened fire in the district, police said. A possible property dispute within the family is suspected as the motive. The deceased, identified as Raju Kare, owned a farm and was involved in real estate activities. The incident happened between 4pm and 4.30pm on Tuesday near Adilabad village, within Vijayapura Rural Police Station limits.

Superintendent of Police Laxman Nimbargi told reporters, "Most probably, after getting information that the compact utility vehicle was coming, the truck came there and rammed into it." He added that despite the impact, the victim appeared to have survived the collision due to the vehicle's sturdy build. "They removed the door on the driver's side, assaulted him with stones, and fired shots," he said.

Preliminary findings suggest a family property dispute, but the exact motive is yet to be confirmed. Forensic teams are investigating, and efforts are underway to identify and arrest the accused. Further details will emerge after the FIR is registered and inquiries are complete. —*PTI*

Mysuru to get 10-acre Ambedkar theme park

MYSURU, 15 APRIL

Karnataka Social Welfare Minister **Dr HC Mahadevappa** on Wednesday announced a Dr BR Ambedkar theme park across 10 acres in Yelwal hobli, Mysuru taluk. The State has already sanctioned funds for the land.

Mahadevappa was speaking at a district-level officers' meeting at Zilla Panchayat Hall to discuss preparations to develop a park that attracts visitors, making Mysuru a tourist destination.

He asked the officials to prepare a detailed project report (DPR) and prepare a blueprint plan for the construction of the park.

The Minister directed officials to ensure the theme park chronicles Ambedkar's life—from his childhood struggles and key milestones to his deep commitment to empowering downtrodden communities—while also highlighting his influential connections with figures such as Shahu Maharaj and Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar.

The Constitution of India, drafted under Ambedkar's, provides solutions to problems of unemployment, drinking water, and other national issues.

"There is an urgent need to highlight the importance of the Indian Constitution," Mahadevappa said, particularly noting education for the future generations on citizens rights and their responsibilities. —*Salar News*

GIA 2.0 to be unveiled on 17 April

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Karnataka's Global Innovation Alliance (GIA) 2.0, an evolved framework to deepen sectoral partnerships and expand global market access, will be launched at the 'Bridge to Bengaluru-Dialogue with Diplomats' event in New Delhi on 17 April. GIA is a pioneering state-led initiative that has become a benchmark in global technology collaboration, with partnerships with over 40 countries, supporting more than 2,000 startups, and facilitating over 60 international MoUs and collaborations.

State Minister for Electronics, IT and Biotechnology Priyank Kharge said, "Over the past year, we have seen our global partnerships evolve from dialogue to delivery." He explained that GIA enables structured pathways for Karnataka startups and companies to access international markets while bringing global innovation ecosystems closer to the state.

The GIA model integrates government-to-government collaboration, global market access for startups, and research partnerships into a single platform, positioning the State as a gateway to global innovation ecosystems. The launch aims to further strengthen these initiatives and foster innovation across sectors. —*PTI*

Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium Chairman Dr Kiran Kumar AS, Ministers Priyank Kharge and NS Bosaraju interact with people on World Quantum Day at the Planetarium on Wednesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

ORANGE ALERT IN KALABURAGI

Water crisis worsens as heatwave grips Karnataka

— MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Amid a sharp rise in temperatures across Karnataka, 344 villages across 58 taluks face drinking water shortages with reservoir levels falling rapidly, said Priyank Kharge, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.

Bengaluru South (Ramanagara) is worst hit, with 210 villages dependent on tankers. Another 125 villages in the district rely on private borewells.

Uttara Kannada, Haliyal and Mundgod are severely affected due to terrain and depleted sources. Meanwhile, the State's 22 key reservoirs hold just 138.04 TMC, or 25.94 per cent of capacity.

Of 3,788 minor irrigation lakes, 2,268 were less than half full by 31 March. The KRS dam near Mysuru, crucial for Bengaluru, has 25.33 TMC with 16.96 TMC usable.

Bengaluru needs 3–4 TMC in addition to its 1,450 MLD Cauvery supply through May.

Authorities also warn that if evaporation continues amid the rising temperatures, village distress could worsen by May. The Health Department has urged citizens to stay indoors during peak hours, and conserve water, warning that there was a high risk of heatstrokes.

North Karnataka is bearing the brunt, as temperatures are keeping people indoors. Kalaburagi district recorded the State's highest temperature at 45°C in Aurad village, , according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD issued an orange alert for Kalaburagi, warning of heatwave conditions in Bidar, Raichur, Yadgir, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Koppal, and Gadag from 15 to 18 April.

Other major readings include Raichur at 40°C, Vijayapura at 40°C, Koppal at 40°C, and Bidar at 39°C.

Temperatures in Bengaluru also touched 36.6°C — its highest in 2026 — and may reach 38°C in the next five days. IMD says the heat index makes 35°C feel closer to 40°C.

Coastal Karnataka will remain hot and humid until 18 April. While winds up to 40 km/h and light rain are possible in less than 25% of regions, officials say relief will be minimal. —*Salar News*

Nara Lokesh appointed as TDP Nat'l Working Prez

AMARAVATI, 15 APRIL

In a significant political move in Andhra Pradesh, IT Minister Nara Lokesh was appointed as the TDP's National Working President. A press release described it as a major generational shift, noting that Lokesh is the son of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and grandson of TDP founder NT Rama Rao. The overhaul included the formation of a 29-member politburo, a 31-member national committee, and a 185-member state committee, all designed considering social, regional, and political balance. The party also reappointed Gajuwaka MLA P Srinivas Rao as state president, alongside new appointments of Rajesh Kilaru and Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu as 'national' general secretaries, signalling a new leadership phase. *—PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Omar refuses to cut tricolour ribbon citing respect

SRINAGAR, 15 APRIL

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah refused to cut an inaugural ribbon featuring saffron, white, and green stripes during an event at Kashmir Haat. Instead, he untied the ribbon and handed it back to the organisers, emphasising that it should be kept with respect. Abdullah was inaugurating the 'Know Your Artisans' event when he noticed the colours of the Indian tricolour on the ribbon. Accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary and others, he opted to remove the ribbon and continued with the event proceedings. The moment was captured on camera and quickly circulated on social media, highlighting his stance on respecting the national flag's symbolism. *—PTI*

YSRCP media official detained over post on CM

AMARAVATI, 15 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Police detained Srihari Pudi, general secretary of the YSRCP media wing, over a social media post criticising Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. He was moved to Kuppam in Chittoor district, where the case was registered. An official confirmed, "We are bringing him in one social media case. He is with us," and added that Pudi would be produced in a local court. The YSRCP alleged that Pudi was unlawfully detained on his way from former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's residence at Tadepalli village in Guntur district. The party claimed police seized his laptop and mobile, and raised concerns over transparency and civil liberties, condemning the arrest as 'illegal'. *—PTI*

Govt gives Chadha Z+ security after Punjab's snub

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Raghav Chadha's category Z+ security cover has been reinstated by the Centre based on a threat assessment report by the Intelligence Bureau, which recommended enhanced protection, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs. High-level paramilitary protection will be extended to him in both Delhi and Punjab. For the time being, Delhi Police has been asked to provide immediate security to Chadha until central arrangements are in place, sources told India Today. This comes just hours after the AAP-led Punjab government withdrew Chadha's earlier Z+ security. While the state government has not issued an official explanation, the move followed Chadha's removal from Rajya Sabha. *—AGENCIES*

Delimitation will hurt South, federalism: Vijayan warns

TMC accuses Centre of pursuing a 'devious plot' in disguise

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday warned that the proposed delimitation exercise could undermine India's federal structure and adversely affect states like Kerala, as opposition to the Centre's plan widened across the country.

Vijayan said the Bill, expected to be introduced in a special parliamentary session and based on the 2011 Census, would impact the rights of states and the principle of equitable justice. He also criticised the Centre for moving ahead on such a crucial issue without building consensus with state governments.

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Bengal also stepped up its attack, alleging that the government plans to expand Lok Sabha strength from 543 to 850 seats. Senior leader Derek O'Brien accused the Centre of pursuing a "devious plot" under the cover of the Women's Reservation Bill.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan *—PTI*

"Delimitation is the devious agenda. Women are the excuse," he said, accusing the government of not genuinely supporting women's reservation.

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to address concerns raised by southern states, warning the issue could become sensitive if not handled carefully.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the exercise would "suppress" southern voices and called the timing of the special parliamentary session a "planned conspiracy" to keep MPs from Tamil Nadu and West Bengal away due to election campaigning. He questioned why the session could not be held after polls.

Actor-politician Vijay, chief of TVK, urged the Centre to withdraw the proposed Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, calling it a "biased move" that would reduce Tamil Nadu and southern states' representation in Parliament.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said delimitation was being undertaken without a fresh Census and would trigger strong opposition from southern states. While supporting the Women's Reservation Act and noting Maharashtra's role in advancing women's political representation, he warned that delimitation itself would create a "serious situation" in the country. BJD President Naveen Patnaik urged Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to convene a special assembly session within 48 hours to discuss safeguarding state interests, while welcoming the Women's Reservation Bill. *—PTI*

- CM Pinarayi Vijayan said the Bill, expected to be introduced in a special parliamentary session and based on the 2011 Census, would impact the rights of states and the principle of equitable justice. He also criticised the Centre for moving ahead on such a crucial issue without building consensus with state governments.

'TMC TARGETED'

Baised conduct by EC officials: TMC writes to CEC

KOLKATA, 15 APRIL

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) party in West Bengal has written to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, alleging "biased conduct" by Election Commission officials in the state.

The party also sought action against senior poll panel officials over their "illegal" directive targeting its leaders, including Abhishek Banerjee.

In a complaint dated 14 April, the party claimed that "instructions have been given to police and other observers and CAPF officials to target and search vehicles of TMC leaders and their family members".

The ruling party also attached purported screenshots of WhatsApp messages, allegedly communicated to police and expenditure observers, and claimed, "Instructions are dispersed to also target TMC's campaign-related activities, outreach programmes."

FISH-RICE BATTLE CAMPAIGN

Meanwhile, the first day of the Bengali new year 'Poila Boisakh' witnessed high-decibel campaigning as senior leaders from ruling TMC and BJP traded charges over cultural identity and governance. TMC minister Aroop Biswas led a procession from the Garia

Bramhapur in south Kolkata, centred on the theme of 'Maach-Bhaat-e-Bangali' (Bengalis swear by fish and rice). He alleged that the BJP would impose curbs on fish and meat-eating if it came to power.

'WILL WITHDRAW CASES POST WIN'

Separately, in a recorded video message from Malda to a gathering in the upper reaches of Lebong in Darjeeling, Union Home Minister Amit Shah regretted his inability to reach them due to inclement weather. He said the BJP would resolve the Gorkha issue and free all prisoners involved in past violent agitations.

TAINT-FREE PM

Shah also vowed to recover every penny the TMC has allegedly "stolen from the people of Bengal through corruption." He asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has no taint of graft on him even after two decades in power. *—PTI*

DMK alliance will win two-thirds majority, says DKS

COIMBATORE/ OTTAPIDARAM/ CHENNAI, 15 APRIL

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and senior Congress leader DK Shivakumar on Wednesday asserted here that the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance will win a two-thirds majority in the 234-seat Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu.

Shivakumar was here to campaign for the DMK-Congress alliance.

He said that the DMK has taken along all sections of the society and provided good welfare schemes for the people. He said in contrast, the income of the common man had been decreasing due to the policies of the central government.

"Now, under Stalin's leadership, I think there will be a cakewalk. With a two-thirds majority, DMK and its allies will win this election," DK Shivakumar said.

In Tamil Nadu, Shivakumar campaigned for Congress candidate Gopinath Palaniyappan from the Erode (East) Assembly constituency.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and senior Congress leader DK Shivakumar in Tamil Nadu ahead of the Assembly elections *—X/DKS*

'REJECT BJP'

Meanwhile, addressing a public meeting in Ottapidaram constituency in Thoothukudi district, Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin urged the electorate to reject the BJP and its allies to protect the state's self-respect.

DISCREPANCY IN ASSETS DECLARATION

In Chennai, the Madras High Court on Wednesday sought a report from the Income Tax department on the alleged discrepancies in declaration of assets in the poll affidavits filed by Udhayanidhi, who is seeking re-election from Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni assembly constituency.

A comparative analysis showed the 'disappearance' of over Rs 7 crore in investments, the petitioner Kumaravel claimed and urged direction to the EC in this regard. *—PTI*

Chh'garh govt sets up panel to draft Uniform Civil Code

RAIPUR, 15 APRIL

The Chhattisgarh cabinet has decided to form a high-level committee, headed by retired judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, to prepare a draft of Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The aim is to simplify laws and promote religious and gender equality.

The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai at Mantralaya Mahanadi Bhawan, an official statement said. The CM has been authorised to nominate committee members.

Currently, marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, maintenance, and family disputes in Chhattisgarh are governed by different personal laws based on religion.

The Constitution's Article 44 directs the state to work towards implementing a UCC for all citizens. The existence of multiple personal laws creates inequality and makes the justice system more complex. The committee will invite suggestions from citizens, organisations, and experts, possibly via a web portal. *—PTI*

ASSAM LOP FLAGS SERIOUS LAPSES IN STRONGROOM SECURITY

GUWAHATI, 15 APRIL

Leader of Opposition in Assam assembly, **Debabrata Saikia**, has written to the Election Commission (EC), alleging "serious breach" of norms in securing strongrooms designated for several constituencies, including Nazira, from where he is contesting as a Congress candidate, and demanded an inquiry into the matter.

In a letter to Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel, he claimed "severe and alarming breach and violations" of EC guidelines in the handling, storage and security of post-poll election materials for the constituencies.

Saikia also provided "photographic and video evidence" along with the letter.

Polling for all 126 Assam assembly constituencies took place on 9 April. Votes will be counted on 4 May.

"During my visit to the Material Safety Cell today noon, I observed that Rooms No. 11, 12, and 13, designated for storing election materials of Nazira and other Constituencies, are not being maintained in accordance with the prescribed

ECI norms," Saikia said in the letter, dated 14 April.

He was referring to the strongrooms in Sibsagar Govt HS & MP School.

The condition of the access points to these strongrooms reflects "serious non-compliance" with established security protocols, and out of the doors inspected, only one was secured with a padlock and even that was not properly sealed, he alleged.

"Several doors were merely shut from the inside or fastened with simple latches, making them easily accessible with minimal manipulation. In multiple instances, doors were either single-locked or locked internally, without adherence to the mandatory double-lock system," Saikia further added. *—PTI*

Samrat is BJP's 1st Bihar CM, JD(U) gets 2 netas

PATNA, 15 APRIL

BJP leader Samrat Choudhary was on Wednesday sworn in as the 24th Chief Minister of Bihar, the first saffron party member to make it to the top post in the state.

He was administered the oath of office by Governor Syed Ata Hasnain at the Lok Bhawan, in presence of among others JD(U) president Nitish Kumar, who had given up the CM's post a day ago, Union minister and former BJP president J P Nadda and Chirag Paswan, who heads the LJP (RV), the third-largest constituent of the ruling NDA in Bihar.

Bijendra Prasad Yadav and Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, both from the JD(U), also took oath on the occasion.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Samrat Choudhary and said his energy, dedication to public service and grassroots experience will prove extremely beneficial for the state.

"...I am fully confident that under his capable leadership, while fulfilling the aspirations of the people, Bihar will touch new heights of all-round development," Modi said in a post on X in Hindi.

"I will get down to work from today itself. Rest assured that the model of governance developed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ex-CM Nitish Kumar will be followed in Bihar," Choudhary told reporters after the swearing in ceremony. *—PTI*

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary *—PTI*

DELHI COURT TAKES COGNISANCE OF ED CHARGESHEET AGAINST VADRA

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

A Delhi court on Wednesday took cognisance of an Enforcement Directorate (ED) chargesheet against businessman **Robert Vadra** in a money laundering case linked to a land deal in Haryana's Shikohpur.

Special Judge Sushant Changotra directed Vadra and the other accused in the case to appear before it on 16 May.

A reasoned order is awaited.

The ED filed the chargesheet against Vadra, husband of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, last July.

It was the first time that any probe agency filed a chargesheet against 57-year-old Vadra in a criminal case.

The probe against Vadra is linked to a land deal at Manesar-Shikohpur (now Sector 83) in Haryana's Gurugram district.

The deal was done in February 2008 by a company named Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd, where Vadra was a director earlier, under which it purchased a 3.5-acre land in Shikohpur from Onkareshwar

- It was the first time that any probe agency filed a chargesheet against 57-year-old Robert Vadra, , husband of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, in a criminal case.

Properties for Rs 7.5 crore.

At the time, Haryana was ruled by the Congress led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Vadra has been denying any wrongdoing, calling the case a "political vendetta" against him and his family, including former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. *—PTI*

LOVELY UNIVERSITY FOUNDER

ED raids MP who replaced Raghav Chadha in Rajya Sabha

JALANDHAR/NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches against AAP Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Kumar Mittal — the man who has replaced MP Raghav Chadha in Rajya Sabha — and educational institutions promoted by him and his family in Punjab and Haryana as part of a FEMA probe, officials said.

About 10 locations in Jalandhar, its nearby areas and Gurugram are being covered under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), they said.

This includes the premises of the Lovely Professional University (LPU) located in Phagwara (Kapurthala district) and two linked educational institutions — Tetr College of Business and Masters Union College of Business — located in Gurugram, ED officials said.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Kumar Mittal; MP Raghav Chadha *—ANI*

Mittal was recently appointed the deputy leader of the AAP in the Rajya Sabha, replacing MP Raghav Chadha. His son, Pratham Mittal, founded the Gurugram-based educational institutions.

The ED, according to the officials, is looking at certain overseas financial transactions of these educational institutions as part of the FEMA investigation.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann strongly condemned the ED's raids alleging that the BJP has begun its "preparations" for the upcoming Punjab Assembly elections.

The Punjab BJP leaders hit back at Mann and alleged that the AAP is a party of "thieves and robbers". *—PTI*

SC stays Khera's transit bail order

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

In a setback to Congress leader Pawan Khera, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed a Telangana High Court order granting one-week transit anticipatory bail. Under a case filed for making allegations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar issued notice to Khera on the plea filed by the Assam government challenging the Telangana HC's 10 April order.

Representing the Assam government, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, argued that the case lacked territorial jurisdiction."The offence is committed in Assam. The FIR is registered in Assam," Mehta said. "This is a complete abuse of the process. He (Khera) does not say why he is not going to Assam," Mehta argued while seeking a stay on the order.

Khera had stated that his wife was staying in Hyderabad. However, Mehta pointed out, the address on her Aadhaar card is a Delhi residence. *—PTI*

—PTI

Crane topples during Metro work in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

A heavy crane engaged in Metro construction toppled at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) early Wednesday, causing traffic snarls but no casualties, officials said. The incident occurred around 4.30 am during work on the Metro Line 2B station, when a 400-tonne mobile crane collapsed near the Asian Heart Hospital junction while lifting a pre-cast beam. A mechanical failure, identified as a gear fault in the lifting boom, led to load transfer to another crane, causing it to tilt. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority said a 600-tonne crane was deployed for clearance, with traffic expected to normalise within hours. —PTI

2 workers die while cleaning sewer in Gurugram

GURUGRAM, 15 APRIL

Two sanitation workers died and another is critical after inhaling toxic gas while cleaning a sewer in Gurugram, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred around 10pm on Tuesday near Ambedkar Chowk on NH-248A, where workers from the Ferozepur Jhirka Municipality were on duty. When one worker failed to return, a second entered the sewer but also did not emerge. A third worker who went in raised an alarm. All three were pulled out using a JCB, but two had died. The third is critical at Al Afia Civil Hospital, Mandi Kheda. The contractor is absconding and a probe is underway. —PTI

—PTI

8 pilgrims killed as bus overturns in Punjab

FATEHGARH SAHIB, 15 APRIL

Eight pilgrims were killed and 19 injured after a bus returning from Anandpur Sahib overturned in Punjab's Fatehgarh Sahib district, police said on Wednesday. The accident occurred around 10 pm on Tuesday near Himmatpura on the Morinda-Chunni road in Bassi Pathana. Around 40 devotees from Main Majri village were travelling after offering prayers on Baisakhi. Six people initially died, with two more succumbing later at Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research and a Mohali hospital. Police suspect a mechanical fault. Locals aided rescue efforts, while the injured were taken to nearby hospitals. —PTI

Sacred jewel goes missing in Kerala, found within hours

PATHANAMTHITTA, 15 APRIL

A gold ornament belonging to Lord Ayyappa briefly went missing during Vishu rituals at Valiyakoikkal Sri Dharma Sastha Temple in Pandalam, but was traced within hours, police said. The missing piece, the coin-like 'Kaniponnu', is part of the sacred Thiruvabharanam preserved by the Pandalam royal family. It is used during poojas and briefly handed to devotees. CCTV footage showed a devotee placing it in his pocket. The Mulakuzha native was traced and said he mistook it for Vishukkaineetam. The ornament was recovered and returned. Police will record his statement and probe if there was any ill intent. —PTI

Clashes erupt in Manipur amid protest over bombing

Prohibitory orders imposed, 4 arrested as more forces deployed

IMPHAL, 15 APRIL

Protesters clashed with security forces in Manipur's Bishnupur, prompting authorities to impose prohibitory orders in the district.

The violence erupted in the Thingungei area on Tuesday as locals protested the recent bomb blast in Tronglaobi that killed two children. Tension escalated after unverified reports of the movement of "suspicious persons" allegedly carrying arms spread, they said.

Clashes broke out in Thingungei and nearby Ningthoukhong, with security forces firing tear gas shells to disperse the crowd.

More than 10 people sustained minor injuries during the clashes, while at least one four-wheeler was set ablaze by protesters, officials said.

Police said a security team was obstructed by locals around 1.30pm near Thingungei following the spread of "mischievous and unverified rumours" regarding the identity and purpose of the personnel.

Clashes broke out in Thingungei and nearby Ningthoukhong, with security forces firing tear gas shells to disperse the crowd —ANI

"A mob gathered and stopped the vehicles of the security forces. The situation escalated when some members of the crowd turned violent, damaging and setting fire to vehicles associated with the security personnel. There were also attempts to detain personnel," the statement said.

Additional forces were rushed to the area, and the crowd was dispersed using "minimum necessary force", including tear gas, to restore law and order, it said.

Police said four prople have been arrested, and efforts are underway to identify others involved in arson, unlawful assembly and obstruction of security forces.

A flag march was conducted in the area to maintain order, they said.

Authorities appealed to the public not to spread rumours or misinformation and warned of strict action against those involved in violence or arson.

Meanwhile, the district magistrate imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the BNSS from 5 pm until further orders, restricting the movement of people.

Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam said the clashes were triggered by unverified information and rumours. Addressing a press conference, the minister said, "A video went viral on social media in which a woman claimed that Kukis were present in a vehicle in Ningthoukhong. The car was stopped at Thingungei area and attacked. The occupants were Assam Rifles personnel going for an operation to seize drugs. They were rescued by state police commandos." —PTI

FRAMEWORK OF DEAL READY

Indian team to visit US next week for trade pact talk

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

An official delegation will visit Washington next week to hold trade talks with US authorities, an official source said on Wednesday.

The bilateral meeting between the trade officials of the two countries holds immense importance as India and the US have finalised the framework for an interim trade agreement.

The team will visit the US next week, the source said.

The pact was initially slated for signing in March, but changes in the tariff landscape following a US Supreme Court ruling have altered the situation.

Official sources have earlier stated that the agreement will be signed once the new global tariff architecture of America is in place.

India and the US, in February, announced finalisation of a framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement. According to that framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent.

However, the tariff architecture in the US has changed following its Supreme Court ruling against President Donald Trump's sweeping reciprocal tariffs.

After that, the US president imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from 24 February. In light of these changes, the meeting between the chief negotiators of India and the US was postponed last month. —PTI

Recuse Justice Sharma, her kids are govt lawyers: Kejri

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

AAP's Arvind Kejriwal and Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma —PTI

Seeking recusal of Delhi High Court judge Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has claimed in an affidavit that the judge's children are empanelled central government lawyers who receive work through solicitor general Tushar Mehta who appeared for the CBI.

Kejriwal, in an additional affidavit filed in relation to his application seeking Justice Sharma to withdraw from hearing the probe agency's petition against his discharge in the liquor policy case, said there was a "direct conflict of interest", which "amplified" his apprehension and constituted grounds for recusal.

He also prayed for time to make further oral and rejoinder submissions, fearing that continuing the case before Justice Sharma might not carry the "full appearance of judicial detachment, independence and neutrality that the law requires".

Kejriwal raised several objections against the judge hearing the CBI plea on 13 April, including that she had earlier denied him relief on his petition challenging his arrest, refused to grant relief on bail pleas of other accused, including Manish Sisodia and K Kavitha, and also made "strong and conclusive" findings. Mehta opposed the plea and urged Justice Sharma to initiate contempt action against Kejriwal and others for seeking her recusal —PTI

Noida DM warns of blacklisting contractors if workers protest

NOIDA, 15 APRIL

Gautam Buddh Nagar District Magistrate Medha Roopam has warned outsourcing agencies and contractors of strict action, including blacklisting and licence cancellation, in case of any unruly behaviour by them or their workers.

The warning comes in the wake of a large-scale protest by thousands of factory workers, including women, in Noida that turned violent on Monday.

The warning comes in the wake of a large-scale protest by thousands of factory workers, including women, in Noida —PTI

Chairing a meeting with outsourcing agencies and contractors of various industrial units on Tuesday, Roopam stressed the need for 100 per cent compliance with government guidelines to maintain industrial peace in the district.

She cautioned that any disruption in industrial activity would adversely impact all stakeholders as well as the overall development of the state and assured the government's commitment to protecting the interests of both workers and employers.

Meanwhile, workers at a private university in Greater Noida's Dadri staged a protest on Wednesday, demanding a salary hike.

Hundreds of men and women workers squatted on a road outside the Shiv Nadar University entrance gate in the Dadri area and raised slogans pressing for their demands.

They demanded an increase in salaries and a doubling of the overtime payment, among other issues. —PTI

100 hospitalised, 1 dead after eating at Odisha school

BHUBANESWAR/ BARIPADA, 15 APRIL

Over 100 students have fallen ill, and one Class 5 student died on Tuesday, after eating a mid-day meal at government-run Kakabandha Ashram School in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district on Sunday, which reportedly included food "not on the school's authorised menu".

Students complained of discomfort and experienced loose motion and vomiting. Over 100 students were rushed to a community health centre, 67 of them were transferred to PMR and Hospital in Baripada, officials noted.

"Class 5 student Rupali Besra was admitted to the ICU on Monday and died on Tuesday morning despite treatment," said Mayurbhanj Collector Hema Kanta Say

Currently, 66 students are hospitalised, and 41 are in the community health centre, with medical teams deployed to both the school and the health centre," the officer added.

Late on Tuesday night, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi expressed his condolences and ordered a probe into the causes of the illness and death. He has instructed the Revenue Divisional Commissioner to start investigating on Wednesday. Additionally, a grant of Rs 3 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) was announced for the family of the deceased. —PTI

HR at TCS Nashik ignored women workers' harassment: SIT

NASHIK, 15 APRIL

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged harassment case at the Tata Consultancy Services Nashik branch has found that senior HR officials allegedly ignored repeated complaints, with investigators also examining a possible money trail and collusion among accused persons, police said on Wednesday.

According to police, HR manager Nida Khan is the alleged "mastermind" who suppressed complaints and failed to escalate over 70 messages received from victims. Despite being part of the POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) Committee, she allegedly advised complainants to drop the matter and took no concrete action.

Investigators have recovered around 78 suspicious call records, emails and chat exchanges between accused individuals, along with evidence indicating possible financial transactions. Police sources said Assistant General Manager at the Nashik branch allegedly remained in contact with accused Danish Shaikh even after the case was registered, including a call made prior to his arrest.

The SIT is examining the possibility of collusion after analysing digital and communication records. So far, nine cases have been registered—one at Deolali Camp police station and eight at Mumbai Naka—based on complaints from employees, including allegations of harassment, coercion and forced religious conversion.

On April 13, a court remanded the operations manager to further police custody. The prime accused, Danish Shaikh, along with Asif Ansari, Shafi Shaikh, Raza Memon, Tausif Attar and Shahrukh Qureshi, are currently lodged in Nashik Road Jail.

Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran has ordered an internal inquiry, describing the allegations as "gravely concerning and anguishing". He said the company has initiated action against those involved and is fully cooperating with investigators, reaffirming a zero-tolerance policy towards misconduct and coercion. Police have examined over 40 CCTV clips and recorded statements from victims and accused. —ANI

Death toll rises to 16 in Vedanta plant blast

SAKTI, 15 APRIL

The death toll in the blast at Vedanta Ltd's power plant in Singhitarai village has risen to 16, police said on Wednesday, after three more injured workers succumbed in hospitals.

The explosion occurred on Tuesday afternoon in a steel tube carrying high-pressure steam from the boiler to the turbine, leaving several workers with severe burns. Four workers died on the spot and nine soon after. Of the 18 injured, four are in Raipur hospitals and 14 in Raigarh.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai announced Rs 5 lakh compensation for the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured. The company declared Rs 35 lakh compensation, jobs for kin, Rs 15 lakh for the injured, salary continuation and counselling support.

The explosion occurred on Tuesday afternoon in a steel tube carrying high-pressure steam from the boiler to the turbine at the Vedanta Ltd power plant located in Singhitarai village —PTI

Multiple probes have been ordered, including a magisterial inquiry. The Opposition Indian National Congress has sought an FIR and judicial probe, alleging negligence. —PTI

LURED WITH A PROMISE OF JOB

Son was deceived into fighting in Russia: Dad

CHANDIGARH, 15 APRIL

Rakesh Kumar once sent his son to Russia with dreams of a better future. Today, he waits for his return — in a casket.

Twenty-five-year-old Anshu, a resident of a village in Haryana's Rewari district, went to Russia on a study visa on April 20, 2025, but was later allegedly deceived into joining the Russian Army and killed in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. His father, a Chandigarh Transport Undertaking employee posted in Chandigarh, said the family spent nearly Rs 6 lakh through a Sonipat-based travel agent to send him abroad.

Rakesh Kumar said his son, along with several other youths from Haryana, was lured with promises of education and lucrative jobs, but was instead pushed into military training and the frontlines. "I received a call on April 4 from a former Russian Army soldier informing me of his death," he said, adding that the body is yet to reach Moscow.

He said contact with Anshu was lost in November, and the family later learned of his death. Several parents from Haryana have protested at Jantar Mantar in November and December, demanding the return of their children. Social worker Jai Bhagwan of Gram Vikas Samiti has been assisting affected families, saying youths from Punjab and other states were also similarly trapped.

The tragedy is not isolated. In recent months, the bodies of three other youths from Haryana, Anuj Sharma (Karnal), Ankit Jangra (Fatehabad) and another Ankit from Sonipat , have been repatriated after being killed in the conflict.

Anuj, who left in May 2025 on a study visa for a language course arranged through a Karnal agent, was reportedly coerced into combat after being promised non-military jobs. His family lost contact in October, and his body was cremated in March after being returned from Russia.

Similarly, Ankit Jangra was allegedly misled with promises of security jobs paying Rs 2.5 lakh per month after training, only to be sent to the Ukrainian front after signing Russian-language contracts. He had informed his family of his ordeal before contact was lost.

Another victim, Ankit, 30, from Sonipat, a sole breadwinner, was also killed after moving to Russia on a student visa.

Families now allege a wider racket of agents exploiting youths from Haryana, Punjab and other states, turning dreams of education abroad into deadly conscription on a foreign battlefield.. —PTI

JAL JEEVAN SCAM: IAS OFFICER SENT TO 14-DAY JUDICIAL CUSTODY

JAIPUR, 15 APRIL

A court in Jaipur on Wednesday sent retired IAS officer Subodh Agarwal, who was arrested in connection with the alleged Rs 960-crore Jal Jeevan Mission scam, to 14-day judicial custody.

The court rejected ACB's request for police custody and remanded Agarwal to judicial custody.

Agarwal was arrested on 10 April under police custody. Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) produced him before an ACB court on completion of the remand period.

Last month, the ACB arrested nine persons, including senior engineers and retired officials, in connection with the scam. Earlier, the ACB had arrested contractors.

Some firms had allegedly secured tenders by submitting forged completion certificates in connivance with officers.

Talking to reporters outside the court, Agarwal's laweyer Vedant Sharma claimed that four tenders came during Agarwal's tenure while 33 tenders were related to the tenure of his predecessor and should be investigated.

A team from the ACB arrested Agarwal on Thursday last week in connection with the case. —PTI

NEW YEAR CHEER

Some states across India ushered in regional New Year celebrations with traditional fervour on Wednesday. In Assam's Sonitpur, women performed the Bihu dance during Rongali Bihu celebrations marking the onset of spring and the Assamese New Year. In Kolkata, people dressed in traditional attire took part in processions to celebrate Pohela Boishakh. Meanwhile, in Kerala, families observed Vishu, the Malayalam New Year, with rituals symbolising prosperity and new beginnings —PTI

Will new kid Vijay unseat old guard Stalin in TN?

TN CM interacts with a student during his morning walk at Palacode; TVK Chief Vijay during a roadshow in Tiruppur —PTI

The political landscape of Tamil Nadu is witnessing an intriguing churn as actor-turned-politician Vijay attempts to challenge the entrenched dominance of Chief Minister M K Stalin in the upcoming Assembly elections scheduled for April 23. What began as a highly anticipated political entry for Vijay has now evolved into a high-stakes contest between a charismatic newcomer and a seasoned political heavyweight.

Vijay, founder of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), has quickly positioned himself as a serious contender, declaring that the electoral battle will primarily be between his party and the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. His bold assertion sidelines not only the principal opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam but also national players like the Bharatiya Janata Party.

However, Vijay's political journey has not been without turbulence. The tragic stampede in Karur on September 27, 2025, which claimed 41 lives, cast a shadow over his campaign. The incident has led to a CBI probe and triggered broader concerns over crowd management at political rallies, prompting the state government to introduce stricter standard operating procedures. This episode remains a critical test of Vijay's leadership and crisis-handling abilities.

Despite the setback, Vijay's strengths lie in his immense popularity, particularly among youth. His cinematic charisma translates into massive crowd pull, and his appeal to first-time voters could prove decisive. Ideologically, TVK aligns with Tamil Nadu's Dravidian ethos, advocating social justice, an egalitarian society, and a two-language policy. His "super six" promises, including free LPG cylinders and financial assistance for women, aim to tap into welfare-driven electoral sentiments.

Yet, critics argue that Vijay is still finding his footing in politics. His speeches are often compared to film dialogues, raising questions about depth and substance. The party's heavy reliance on him as the sole star campaigner underscores its limited organisational structure. Additionally, the frenzied crowds at his events have occasionally resulted in accidents, drawing negative publicity.

On the other side stands Stalin, a veteran politician who has consolidated his position through governance and coalition management. Leading the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance, he successfully navigated seat-sharing tensions with the Indian National Congress and kept the alliance intact. His strategic inclusion of leaders like O Panneerselvam into the DMK fold signals an effort to broaden his party's base.

Stalin's campaign rests on the "Dravidian model" of governance, emphasising social justice, welfare schemes, and state autonomy. Initiatives such as free bus travel for women and financial support for women heads of families have bolstered his popularity. His government's push for industrialisation, including the Tamil Nadu Shipbuilding Policy 2026, seeks to attract investments and create jobs, particularly targeting the youth demographic.

Moreover, Stalin has effectively framed the election narrative by positioning Tamil Nadu as a progressive, inclusive state in contrast to what he describes as divisive politics elsewhere. Backed by allies such as the Congress, Left parties, and regional outfits, the DMK enters the polls with a robust organisational network and electoral machinery. However, the ruling party is not without vulnerabilities. Allegations of dynasty politics, particularly involving Deputy Chief Minister Udayanidhi Stalin, and controversies surrounding certain ministers have provided ammunition to the opposition. Unfulfilled promises, including the scrapping of NEET and fuel subsidies, remain contentious issues.

Vijay's emergence introduces a fresh dynamic into this contest. He seeks to capitalise on what he perceives as a political vacuum for an alternative to the traditional Dravidian giants. Disillusioned voters, especially the tech-savvy youth, could be drawn to his outsider image and reformist rhetoric.

Yet, the challenge before Vijay is formidable. The DMK's entrenched grassroots presence, coupled with the AIADMK's enduring influence, creates a competitive electoral environment. Going solo without alliances may further complicate TVK's prospects. As Tamil Nadu heads toward the polls, the central question remains: can Vijay's star power translate into electoral success, or will Stalin's experience and governance record prevail? The answer will not only determine the state's immediate political future but also signal whether Tamil Nadu is ready to embrace a new political force or continue with its established leadership. In this clash of charisma versus continuity, the electorate holds the verdict. —PTI

SALAR سالار

Murshidabad fights for identity amid SIR deletions

Loudspeaker vans continue to roll through narrow village roads, blaring familiar promises of jobs, roads and housing. Yet in Pratapganj village, this election is not about development. It is about identity and the fundamental democratic right to vote.

Seated on a charpoy outside his mud house, 60-year-old farmer Naushad Ali scans the revised electoral roll repeatedly. His name is listed. So is his wife's. Missing, however, is his son Raju, who works at a hotel in Kochi.

Raju had voted in the 2024 general election before migrating for work. "Now his name has suddenly been deleted," Ali says. "If the father is in the list and the son is not, what are they trying to prove?"

Across Murshidabad, such questions are reshaping the political discourse ahead of the Assembly elections. In a region where politics has long revolved around religion, migration and identity, the contest has taken an unusual turn, from ballots to the very legitimacy of names on electoral rolls.

Murshidabad, which has the highest proportion of Muslims in West Bengal, has recorded the third-largest number of deletions under the Special Intensive Revision, with more than 7.48 lakh names struck off. The scale is most striking in Samserganj, where nearly 92,000 names have disappeared, reducing the electorate from 2.48 lakh to 1.56 lakh. Neighbouring Lalgola has seen the second-highest deletions, with around 68,500 names removed.

In Pratapganj alone, residents claim that nearly 2,500 of the 3,500 registered voters have been deleted — most of them Muslims. The impact is visible in tea stalls, outside mosques and in crowded photocopy shops, where conversations have shifted from electoral outcomes to a more basic concern: whether individuals will be able to vote at all.

Seventy-five-year-old Amelia Bibi clutches her laminated voter identity card as she recounts decades of participation in elections. "I have voted since 1977, after the Emergency," she says. "I voted when Indira Gandhi lost, when Jyoti Basu ruled, and when Mamata Banerjee came. Now they say my name is not there. At this age, will they call me a Bangladeshi?"

In Kalmegha village in Lalgola, 22-year-old first-time voter Sefat Ali faces a similar predicament. While his elder brother's name remains on the list, his has been removed. "I was born and brought up here, but now they are asking me to prove I belong," he says.

Across Samserganj and Lalgola, families are opening old trunks and metal boxes, retrieving documents — voter slips, school certificates, ration cards, electricity bills and land deeds — in an effort to re-establish their identity. The fear extends beyond losing a vote; it is about the possibility of being told one does not belong.

What should have been a routine administrative exercise has instead emerged as one of the most contentious political fault lines in the state ahead of the election.

The ruling TMC has alleged that the deletions amount to a "silent NRC" in Bengal's Muslim-majority regions, accusing BJP of attempting to reshape the electorate. The BJP, in turn, maintains that the revision is a necessary correction of years of "bogus voting" and illegal infiltration.

Samserganj BJP leader Shashi Charan Ghosh argues that abnormal growth in voter numbers points to systemic irregularities. Between 2011 and 2016, over 41,000 voters were added in the constituency, with a similar increase between 2016 and 2021. "For years, fake voters were protected for political gain," he says. "Now that the list is being cleaned, there are allegations of conspiracy. Genuine citizens have nothing to fear."

Murshidabad MP Abu Taher Khan rejects this claim, accusing the BJP of implementing the National Register of Citizens "through the back door". He alleges that deletions are concentrated in Muslim-majority areas and among poorer sections, including migrant families. "This is political targeting," he says. "If they cannot win electorally, they are trying to alter the voter base itself."

The Indian National Congress has sought to strike a more balanced note. Senior leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury contends that both sides are exploiting the situation. "The BJP wants to turn every Muslim into a suspect. The TMC wants to turn every deletion into panic. Both are doing politics over fear," he says.

The controversy is particularly significant given the demographic and electoral realities of Murshidabad. Constituencies such as Suti, Samserganj, Lalgola, Rejinagar, Hariharpara and Beldanga are heavily influenced by minority voters. In many cases, a swing of 10,000 to 15,000 votes can determine the outcome. In Samserganj, the number of deleted names is nearly five times the victory margin in the last Assembly election.

Political observers privately acknowledge that if the deletions persist, the electoral map of Murshidabad could shift dramatically in 2026. —PTI

People queue up in scorching heat to appeal against SIR deletions in Murshidabad —PTI

LETTERS

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Viktor Orban's election loss shows the limits of propaganda

Hungarian voters rejected the 16-year rule of authoritarian strongman Viktor Orban, electing his one-time political ally, Peter Magyar, to replace him —PTI

Hungarian voters have overwhelmingly rejected the 16-year rule of authoritarian strongman Viktor Orban, electing his one-time political ally, Peter Magyar, to replace him. Magyar's Tisza party has secured a two-thirds majority in parliament and therefore a supermajority. This will allow the new government to roll back some of the illiberal measures introduced Orban governments over the years. Magyar has said that he intends to work for a "free, European" Hungary, which would reverse his predecessor's rejection of Brussels.

One of Magyar's key election promises was to restore press freedom, and reform state-run media, which, under Orban, had become a powerful tool for distributing disinformation.

This huge win for Tisza followed a campaign marred by what many foreign monitors claimed were unprecedented levels of disinformation, foreign interference and government propaganda. In fact, the result may come as a surprise to those who believe that in information autocracies such as Hungary, where access to news and political discussion is controlled by what have been dubbed "spin dictators", election results can easily be controlled by the ruling party.

Orban is a textbook example of an information autocrat. The propaganda arsenal deployed by his ruling Fidesz party in this campaign was as formidable as ever. Pro-government election billboards blanketed the country, financed not just by Fidesz but by the government itself and by powerful publicly owned agencies such as the state energy conglomerate MVM, by the Magyar Nemzeti Bank (MNB) – Hungary's central bank – and by a host of government-aligned NGOs.

State communication channels were repurposed wholesale for partisan messaging. Pro-government media and troll networks amplified existential warnings about the opposition.

But Fidesz's tactics went further than messaging. Elaborate theatrics were deployed to scare or influence voters. A bomb was allegedly defused in Serbia that had supposedly targeted Hungarian election infrastructure. Ukrainian cash and gold assets were seized on spurious grounds concerning some shadowy threat from Ukraine's "war mafia". Each spectacle seemed designed to lend weight to Fidesz's warnings about external interference.

Fidesz attempted to fire up its electoral base by framing the election as an existential struggle for Hungary itself. Since it was first elected in 2010, Fidesz has relied almost exclusively on this strategy, painting its challenger as a danger to the country, and turning elections into a matter of life and death.

But this time around, Fidesz has learned to its cost that it was insufficient to stick to the playbook that has kept it in power for 16 years. Things have changed – most notably the Hungarian economy, which has essentially flatlined since 2022, with near-zero real GDP growth compounded by the highest inflation in the EU. The second big shift has been political – the consolidation of the opposition behind a single credible challenger to Orbán. Previously, Fidesz had been able easily defeat the fragmented and ineffective coalitions it had previously faced.

ORBAN'S FAILING APPEAL

Despite Orban's considerable arsenal of information manipulation tools, his election pitch appears to have been broadly rejected. This appears to have been a failure of strategy, unexpected from such a wily political veteran. In his annual "state of the nation" address in February, Orbán promised more of the same, to protect Hungary from change and outside threats such as from Brussels.

But that's a pitch to true believers, not to the wavering or undecided. There was no attempt to build bridges to new groups or attempt to extend his electoral coalition.

Having watched Fidesz govern all this time, I believe the answer is that the voter manipulation system the party built built over the years is poorly suited for this purpose. Persuading new voters to come round to your side is hard and requires credibility, good arguments and strong messages, none of which the government has any more. Much easier to focus on fear caused by slander, misinformation and the moral panic button.

This clearly didn't work. In February, a survey found that only 23 per cent of Hungarians believed the government's central claim that victory for Magyar and his Tisza party would result in Hungary being dragged into a foreign war, a theme hammered on by Orbán in his state of the nation speech. Even among Fidesz voters, nearly half – 43 per cent – said they didn't believe this.

Political science literature is clear on the risks of negative campaigning. Attack messages can attract attention – but their effectiveness hinges on whether voters find them credible. Dishonest attacks can boomerang, eroding trust in the attacker rather than the target. And this clearly happened in Hungary in this election campaign.

All of which points to a broader lesson about information control in illiberal regimes: it can easily be overstated. Hungary's 2026 election has revealed that an information autocracy can have its limits. And in the face of a faltering economy and a united and credible opposition, Orbán's campaign reached those limits – and failed as a result. —*The Conversation*

— SCREENGRAB

US strikes on 'drug' boat in Pacific kills 4

WASHINGTON, 15 APRIL

US Southern Command conducted a kinetic strike on Tuesday, hitting a vessel allegedly operated by Designated Terrorist Organisations, killing four narco-terrorists. In a post on X, the Southern Command said, "On 14 April, at the direction of SOUTHCOM commander Gen. Francis L Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organisations. Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific ". US Southern Command oversees military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, where recent strikes have pushed the death toll to 175 since September, when President Donald Trump ordered operations against Latin American drug cartels, reported Al Jazeera. —*ANI*

Immigrants should identify as Americans: Vance

WASHINGTON, 14 APRIL

US Vice President JD Vance said immigrants who gain US citizenship should identify primarily as Americans, stressing national interest over ties to countries of origin. Speaking at the University of Georgia, he noted that regardless of background, citizens must prioritise the United States. Responding to a student's concerns on H-1B visa fraud, Vance said the system works only when individuals see themselves as Americans.

At the Turning Point USA event, he cited interactions with immigrants and praised contributions from diverse communities.

Referring to his wife Usha Vance's Indian-origin family, he highlighted their integration and commitment to the US, even as he was heckled during his address. —*PTI*

Ukraine asks Israel to block Russian ship carrying stolen grain

KYIV, 15 APRIL

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha has asked his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar to halt a Russian ship carrying "stolen" grain from Ukraine that docked in the Haifa port. Ukraine considers all grain produced in four regions that Russia annexed as stolen. The Russian ship, ABINSK, is loaded with 43,765.18 tonnes of wheat, according to Ukrainian media. Sybiha posted on X that he told Sa'ar that "such illegal trade with stolen goods must not be allowed" and that allowing the "illegal export of stolen Ukrainian agricultural products is part of Russia's broader war effort".

7 KILLED IN STRIKES

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that seven people were killed in Russian strikes across Ukraine.

Russia launched 324 drones in the period and three ballistic missiles from Tuesday to Wednesday, targeting half a dozen regions, Ukraine's Air Force said.

The strikes come after a brief ceasefire over the Orthodox Easter weekend. —*AGENCIES*

Trump says he's opening Hormuz for China

Comes hours after blockade takes effect; Munir lands in Iran

The US said nearly 10,000 of its troops were imposing the blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, as Iran continued to patrol its waters —*X@CENTCOM/PRESS TV*

WASHINGTON, 15 APRIL

US President Donald Trump said that he's "permanently" opening the Strait of Hormuz for China, hours after the American military said that Washington's blockade took full effect.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump claimed that China has agreed not to provide weapons to Iran as reports circulate that Beijing has considered transferring arms. China has denied the reports.

"President Xi (Jinping) will give me a big, fat, hug when I get there in a few weeks," Trump stated. "We are working together smartly. Doesn't that beat fighting?"

In an interview earlier on Wednesday, Trump said the war was "very close to over."

Iran has responded to the US' military blockade on the Strait, which US Central Command said it had been "fully implemented" within 36 hours of its launch, by threatening to completely block exports and imports across the Persian Gulf region, the Sea of Oman, and the Red Sea.

The US blockade is "a prelude to violating the ceasefire," said senior Iranian military officer. Ali Abdollahi

Meanwhile, a Pakistani delegation, led by Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, reached Tehran as part of Islamabad's efforts to bring Iran and US back to the negotiating table. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi welcomed them.

Trump had earlier said that a second round of talks with Iran could be held in Islamabad "over the next two days". —*Agencies*

> **If Iran chooses the path of economic strangulation by blockade, then the world will pass Iran by. New energy routes (and) new supply chains will be established... and America will power the world... for the next 100 years.... and Iran will become a footnote... President Trump has... played the checkmate move**
>
> —Stephen Miller, White House Deputy Chief of Staff

> **We emphasise constructive dialogue, but will not be forced to surrender. Any attempt to impose will or force Iran to surrender is doomed to failure, and the people will never accept such an approach. Iran is not seeking war**
>
> —Masoud Pezeshkian, Iranian President

> **In a world moving toward greater fragmentation & sharper power competition, international law is indispensable. Without it, instability spreads, mistrust deepens & conflicts spiral out of control.... International law applies to all States, without exception... (and) urgently to the conflict in the Middle East. Respect for its rules is not optional.**
>
> —Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Israel bombs Lebanon amid talks

TEL AVIV, 15 APRIL

Israel's military said on Wednesday that it had struck more than 200 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, as negotiators met in the US for the first direct talks between the two countries in decades.

Lebanon's National News Agency reported airstrikes and artillery shelling in multiple southern Lebanese locations on Wednesday, including near Bint Jbeil, where Israeli forces have encircled Hezbollah fighters.

The fighting in the south has continued after Israeli and Lebanese officials concluded their first direct talks in decades. Lebanese officials want a ceasefire to halt fighting that has displaced more than 1 million people in their country, while Israel wants the Lebanese government to assume responsibility for disarming Hezbollah.

However, no breakthroughs were made during the two-hour session, even as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called it a "historic opportunity".

Notably, Hezbollah has said it would not abide by any potential agreement that the Lebanese government reached with Israel.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah called the talks "disgraceful" and dared the government hold a public referendum to determine the future of Hezbollah's arsenal if it "truly wants to reflect the aspirations of the people".

At least 2,124 people have been killed in Israeli strikes in Lebanon and 1 million people displaced. —*PTI*

Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike on the village of Qlaileh, Lebanon, on Wednesday —*PTI*

Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on Wednesday —*XINHUA*

Russia willing to store Iran's enriched uranium: Lavrov

BEIJING, 15 APRIL

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday that Iran has an "inalienable right" to "enrich uranium for civilian purposes" and said that Russia was willing to store and reprocess Iran's enriched uranium.

Whether Iran, in its negotiations with the US, decides to "pause" or "insists on preserving this right," Russia will accept "any approach based on principle of the universality of the right to enrichment," Lavrov told reporters in Beijing, where he is on a two-day visit.

He added that Moscow was ready to play its role "reprocessing highly enriched uranium into fuel-grade uranium, transferring a certain amount to Russia for storage".

Iran is a signatory to the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which gives countries the right to peaceful nuclear energy programmes.

CHINA-RUSSIAN TIES PRECIOUS: Xi

Chinese President Xi Jinping said ON Wednesday that the stability and certainty of China-Russia relations are particularly "precious" during his meeting with Lavrov.

Xi called for the two countries to showcase the responsibility and commitment of major powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council, according to state media. This includes upholding multilateralism and revitalising the authority of the UN and international order "in a more just and reasonable direction". —*PTI*

Europe mulls NATO without US, opening Hormuz on its own

BRUSSELS, 15 APRIL

Europe is mulling a fallback plan to ensure that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) survives in an event of the US pulling back, according to a media report. European leaders have also drafted a postwar plan to open the Strait of Hormuz

European officials- Wall Street Journal has learned- are referring to the plan as "European NATO." They seek to get more Europeans in the higher ranks of command-and-control roles and supplement US military assets with their own.

The plan still floats informally through dinner meetings, and is not intended to rival the current alliance. European officials are aiming to deterrence against Russia.

This comes as US President Donald Trump has repeatedly belittled NATO as a "paper tiger" and has threatened to annex Greenland from the Kingdom of Denmark.

It is unclear what the new coalition would look like, given that the US is the largest funder of NATO. However, NATO Chief Mark Rutte recently said that the alliance will be "more European led", but it is not clear if he meant the new organisation.

Meanwhile, Europe's postwar coalition to demine the Strait of Hormuz, as reported by the WSJ, comes amid France and UK's summit on Friday to ensure free maritime trade. —*ANI*

> **NATO wasn't there for us, and they won't be there for us in the future**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

Tell Pope that Iran killed 42,000 protesters: Trump

Despite intense backlash from his core Christian voter base, Trump took another swipe at Pope Leo XIV: "Will someone please tell Pope Leo that Iran has killed at least 42,000 innocent, completely unarmed, protesters in the last two months?" he wrote on Truth Social.

Burj al Arab hotel in Dubai to close for 18-months

The United Arab Emirate's iconic Burj al Arab hotel will be closed for 18 months for "restoration", its operator Jumeirah Group said on Wednesday. The hotel has defined Dubai's skyline for decades, but was reportedly damaged by an intercepted drone during the Iran war.

US' $250M surveillance drone crashes in Gulf

The US Naval Safety Command said the MQ-4C Triton unmanned aerial vehicle, used for surveillance, crashed, reportedly in the Perisan Gulf. Initial reports claimed that Iran had downed the drone. Media reports estimate the damage to be around $240-250 million.

IAEA Chief urges strict Iran checks in any deal

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi said that "very detailed" measures to verify Iran's nuclear activities must be included in a potential US-Iran agreement. He told press in Seoul that Iran has an "ambitious" nuclear programme that "requires the presence of IAEA inspectors".

Pak PM to visit Saudi, Qatar and Turkey amid diplomatic push

ISLAMABAD, 15 APRIL

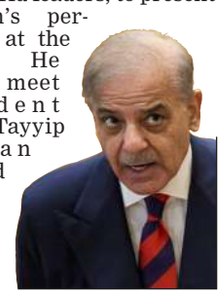
Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will on Wednesday embark on a four-day official visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to discuss bilateral cooperation and regional peace.

The visit comes as Pakistan is engaged in high-level contacts to bring Iran and the US back to the negotiating table.

Sharif's visits from 15–18 April to Saudi Arabia and Qatar will be in the bilateral context, where the he will meet the leadership from the respective countries, the Foreign Office said.

The prime minister's visit to Saudi Arabia coincides with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's announcement in Washington that the gulf nation has committed USD 3 billion in additional financial support for Pakistan, with disbursement expected next week, while also extending its existing USD 5 billion deposit for a longer period. It said will help bolster foreign exchange reserves and strengthen the external account.

Sharif will also participate in the Fifth Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey where he will Leaders' Panel, alongside other world leaders, to present Pakistan's perspective at the Forum. He will meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other key world leaders. —*PTI*



TO LAST INTO WEEKEND

Record-breaking heatwave hits eastern US

ATLANTA, 15 APRIL

An unusual, long-lasting weather pattern is set to blast hot air across the US east coast, including in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC. The heat wave is threatening to shatter record high temperatures on Wednesday.

John Feerick, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather.com, announced that starting on Wednesday, "we're going to have records challenged from basically Georgia all the way up through the New York City area and back towards the Ohio Valley."

The National Weather Service is projecting a high of 80°F (30°C) for Central Park in New York City on Wednesday. The record high for the date is 87°F, set in 1941. The near-record temperature is unusual for April and is expected to last into this weekend, forecasters say.

Even hotter weather is expected in Philadelphia, where Wednesday's high is expected to be 92°F (33.3°C). Other likely hot spots include Washington DC, could see a high of 94°F (34.4°C); and Atlanta is projected to be 88°F (31.1°C).

Forecasters expect the heat to break by Sunday as a 'cold front' moves in, bringing "pleasantly cooler" temperatures by Monday, the Weather Prediction Centre said.

The strong high-pressure ridge, which is funnelling moisture into the southern plains, is driving the unusual heat across eastern US.

This heat wave follows severe storms that hit Kansas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin on Monday, with more expected on Tuesday. —*PTI*

- Around 135 million people in the central and eastern US are likely to experience temperatures 15°F above average and more than 100 record temperatures could be broken this week

Sudan enters 4th year of war with no end in sight

CAIRO, 15 APRIL

As the world turns its attention to Iran, Sudan has entered its fourth year of a war that has thrown the country into the world's largest humanitarian crisis, according to the UN.

The fighting that broke out between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have pushed 13 million people out of their homes and at least 8,00,000 into famine.

At least 59,000 people have been killed, but this is globally accepted as an undercount. At least 6,000 people were killed over three days when the RSF rampaged through the town of el-Fasher in October.

The war exploded from a power struggle amid Sudan's transition to democracy after an uprising forced the military ouster of longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. With neither side able to achieve a decisive victory, Sudan is now divided between the military-backed and internationally recognised government in Khartoum, and the RSF-controlled Darfur.

Both regions include many of Sudan's oil fields and gold mines. The SAF has access to oil refineries, pipelines and Sudan's Red Sea ports, while the RSF and their Janjaweed allies control the region along the border with South Sudan.

The UAE has been accused of backing the RSF, while Egypt is backing the SAF. Both sides have been accused of committing war crimes. —*PTI*

'FORGOTTEN CRISIS'

34 million people, or almost two of every three Sudanese, need assistance: UN	63% of health facilities remain fully or partially functional amid disease outbreaks: WHO
8 million children are still out of school: UNICEF	**Rampant reports of sexual abuse and violence**

Silver surges Rs 2.57L/kg, gold jumps Rs 1.58L/10g

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Silver prices surged by Rs 11,800 to Rs 2.57 lakh per kg while gold advanced by Rs 3,000 to Rs 1.58 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday, driven by fresh buying from jewellers and stockists ahead of Akshaya Tritiya on 19 April. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver soared by Rs 11,800, or 4.81 per cent, to Rs 2,57,000 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Monday's closing level of Rs 2,45,200 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also jumped Rs 3,000, or nearly 2 per cent, to Rs 1,58,000 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). Spot gold fell USD 45.88, or nearly 1 per cent, to USD 4,795.97 per ounce, while silver slipped 1.2 per cent to USD 78.61 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee settles 9P lower at 93.44 against USD

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

The rupee pared initial gains to settle 9 paise lower at 93.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as rising crude oil prices after a sharp fall and higher domestic inflation data dampened sentiment. According to forex analysts, strong buying in domestic equities failed to support the rupee even as it gained initially after US President Donald Trump said that a second round of talks with Iran could be held "over the next two days". At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 93.19 and touched the intraday high of 93.13 against the greenback. The forex market was closed on Tuesday on account of Baba Saheb Ambedkar Jayanti. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was marginally higher by 0.05 per cent at 97.95. *—PTI*

Flipkart, Uber partner to offer SuperCoins

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

E-commerce major Flipkart and ride-hailing platform Uber on Wednesday announced a partnership to integrate Flipkart's 'SuperCoins' reward programme into Uber's mobility services. Under this collaboration, users can earn 4 per cent of their fare as SuperCoins on every eligible Uber ride by linking their Flipkart and Uber accounts. The rewards are capped at 150 coins per trip, though there is no limit on total cumulative earnings. The SuperCoins earned through Uber rides will be credited directly to the user's Flipkart account and can be redeemed across the Flipkart ecosystem, including Flipkart Minutes, Cleartrip, and other partner offerings. New Uber users, or those who have not used the app in the last 84 days, can earn 150 bonus SuperCoins by completing their first ride within 28 days of linking their accounts. *—PTI*

Muthoot Fin seeks shareholder nod for insurance biz

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

Muthoot Finance on Wednesday sought shareholder approval for foraying into the business of insurance distribution in both life and general insurance sectors. In a postal ballot notice, Muthoot Finance sought shareholders' nod for making changes to the Memorandum of Association of the company and aligning with the Companies Act, 2013. Approval is being sought to "carry on and undertake the business and activities of a corporate agent, or insurance intermediary by the provisions of the rules and regulations issued by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India for all classes of insurance business/products in India which includes, Life, General, Health Insurance Business, and all other forms of insurance products/services", Muthoot Finance said in a regulatory filing. *—PTI*

Wholesale inflation rises to 38-month high in March

West Asia war caused a spike rates of fuel, power & mfg items

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

WPI inflation was 2.13 per cent in February, and 2.25 per cent in March last year *—PTI*

Wholesale price inflation rose sharply to an over 3-year high of 3.88 per cent in March, driven by a sharp spike in rates of fuel, power and manufactured items amid the West Asia crisis.

Government data released on Wednesday showed that the Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation rose for the fifth straight month in March as core inflation accelerated, amid softening of primary food items.

The high WPI inflation in March reflects elevated global commodity prices and the impact of the energy price shock since the beginning of the US-Israel-Iran conflict on 28 February.

WPI inflation was 2.13 per cent in February, and 2.25 per cent in March last year.

"Positive rate of inflation in March 2026 is primarily due to increase in prices of crude petroleum & natural gas, other manufacturing, non-food articles, manufacture of basic metals and food articles, etc.," the industry ministry said in a statement.

According to the latest WPI data, inflation in the fuel and power basket spiked to 1.05 per cent in March, from a deflation of 3.78 per cent in February. Inflation in crude petroleum surged to 51.57 per cent during March, against a deflation of 1.29 per cent in the previous month.

Manufactured products inflation rose to 3.39 per cent in March, from 2.92 per cent in February.

Barclays, in a research note, said that March WPI is the sharpest month-on-month increase seen since August 2023. During March, the pace of hike in food article prices, however, eased to 1.90 per cent.

In vegetables, inflation softened to 1.45 per cent in March. *—PTI*

BY OVER 1%

Investors get richer by ₹ 9.41L cr as markets surge

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Investors' wealth surged by Rs 9.41 lakh crore on Wednesday as benchmark indices rebounded sharply amid hopes of renewed diplomatic engagement between the US and Iran.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,263.67 points or 1.64 per cent to settle at 78,111.24. During the day, it zoomed 1,422.85 points or 1.85 per cent to 78,270.42.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 388.65 points or 1.63 per cent to end at 24,231.30.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies jumped by Rs 9,41,461.6 crore to Rs 4,58,55,016.77 crore (USD 4.91 trillion).

US President Donald Trump has said that the war with Iran is "close to over," asserting that if he pulled up stakes right now, it would take Tehran 20 years to rebuild the country.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, InterGlobe Aviation, Eternal, Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the major gainers.

Bharti Airtel and ICICI Bank were the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading at USD 95.72 per barrel, up by 0.98 per cent.

The BSE SmallCap Select index jumped 2.62 per cent and MidCap Select index climbed 2.55 per cent.

Services jumped 3.30 per cent, Focused IT (3.09 per cent), industrials (2.90 per cent), power (2.87 per cent), Consumer Durables (2.84 per cent), IT (2.78 per cent), Capital Goods (2.54 per cent) and Utilities (2.52 per cent).

A total of 3,585 stocks advanced while 802 declined and 126 remained unchanged on the BSE. *—PTI*

Air India asks Tata, S'pore Air for funds after $2.4B loss

GURUGRAM, 15 APRIL

With Air India facing the heat in the wake of a series of adverse situations including crash of Boeing 787 Dreamliner, closure of airspace by Pakistan and the ongoing Middle East conflict hampering its operations it all has resulted in the company registering a record loss of 220 billion rupees ($2.4 billion) in the fiscal year ended on 31 March.

Industry experts say that losses may have spanned a wider spectrum of operability prompting the company now to look for financial assistance from its shareholders to tide over the difficult situation it finds itself in. The grapevine has it that Air India's shareholders Tata Group and Singapore Ltd both of which hold 25.1 per cent share in the company have already begun discussions on ways to urgently pump in cash to combat the difficult situation.

Sources said the amount of the fund injection is still being deliberated upon but it is likely to be far from adequate to meet the current needs. This may prompt the airline to hunt for alternative financing options, sources added. Both Tata Group and Air India are yet to confirm or deny the ongoing discussion on public platforms.

The Singapore Air however refused to comment on the developments. Further adding to the company's woes has been the decision of Air India Chief Executive Campbell Wilson to step down later this year. *—Agencies*

AMID WEST ASIA WAR

India's exports drop $38.92B in March

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

Services exports are estimated at USD 418.31 billion in 2025-26 *—AI*

The country's merchandise exports dropped 7.44 per cent to USD 38.92 billion in March, according to government data released on Wednesday.

Imports too dipped by 6.51 per cent to USD 59.59 billion last year from USD 63.75 billion recorded in the year-ago month, reflecting disruptions in major trade routes like the Strait of Hormuz due to the conflict in West Asia. The country's trade deficit stood at USD 20.67 billion during the month under review.

Briefing the media on the trade data, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that the country's exports are doing well despite challenges. He said the country's exports of goods and services rose 4.22 pc to USD 860 bn during the 2025-26 financial year.

The country's merchandise exports during April-March 2025-26 went up 1 per cent to USD 441.78 billion from USD 437.7 billion. Imports also increased to USD 774.98 billion during the period from USD 721.2 billion in 2024-25.

Services exports are estimated at USD 418.31 billion in 2025-26, the commerce secretary said.

Due to the war involving the US, Israel and Iran, India's exports to the Middle East region fell 57.95 per cent in March, Agrawal said, adding that total imports from that region also declined by 51.64 per cent last month. *—PTI*

Crude unlikely to return to pre-war levels soon: Report

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

Crude oil prices have risen sharply due to the ongoing West Asia conflict and are not expected to return to the earlier level of $65 per barrel in the near term, according to a report by brokerage firm Prabhudas Lilladher. The report noted that the increase in prices is likely to persist, keeping India's import bill elevated for the coming months.

India buys around 4.3 million barrels of crude every single day. That adds up to about $180 billion a year. With prices now much higher, Prabhudas Lilladher estimates India's oil import bill could jump by more than $70 billion a year.

About 20 per cent of the world's crude oil moves through the Strait of Hormuz.

The brokerage noted that the war hasn't just hit tankers and routes. Several global natural gas and oil refineries have been destroyed. These aren't easy to fix.

Even if the tensions between the US and Iran deescalate, freight charges, insurance costs, and tanker availability have all spiked and likely to remain at these levels for long.

These add to the final price of oil even before it reaches India. *—ANI*

GE Aerospace's F414 fighter jet *—GEAEROSPACE*

GE AEROSPACE, HAL CLOSE IN ON SEALING JET ENGINES DEAL

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

US defence major GE Aerospace on Tuesday said it and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) have made significant progress in sealing a collaboration to co-produce F414 jet engines to power India's future combat jets.

Nearly three years ago, GE Aerospace had signed an agreement with HAL to co-produce F-414 fighter jet engines in India.

The two sides have been engaged in talks since then to firm up various aspects of the programme.

"GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) are pleased to announce significant progress regarding F414 co-production today, having reached agreement on technical matters," GE Aerospace said.

"This agreement marks a significant step forward in strengthening economic growth and advancing cooperation for both India and the U.S. and expands the 40-year partnership between GE Aerospace and HAL," it said. *—PTI*

Wipro to buy Alpha Net's customer deals for $70.8M

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

IT services company Wipro will acquire select customer contracts of Alpha Net Consulting at a purchase consideration of up to USD 70.8 million, according to a regulatory filing on Wednesday.

The business acquisition will enable Wipro's access to certain key clientele, their customer contracts as well as the related workforce, augmenting its existing AI-powered, and consulting-led application services capabilities, and fuelling new growth opportunities.

"Wipro Limited, through its subsidiaries, signed a definitive agreement on 14 April, 2026 to acquire select customer contracts of Alpha Net Consulting LLC and its subsidiaries," the BSE filing said.

The deal involves cash purchase consideration of up to USD 70.8 million, subject to closing adjustments. This includes a deferred consideration in the form of earnout, payable subject to achievement of certain performance metrics and conditions.

The transaction is expected to be completed by 30 June, 2026.

The Alpha Net Group provides enterprise software development, data engineering, and managed services for global clientele in an AI-first world. *—PTI*

MONSOON, EL NIÑO, & WAR

ICRA warns of 3 threats to Indian agri sector

NEW DELHI, 15 MARCH

- Fertiliser availability for the upcoming kharif season is another concern. The ongoing West Asia conflict may disrupt supply chains, affecting both raw materials and finished products.

India's agriculture sector may face a challenging year ahead amid concerns over weak monsoon, possible El Niño conditions, and fertiliser supply risks linked to the West Asia conflict, according to a report by ICRA.

The India Meteorological Department's (IMD) first long-range forecast (LRF) for the 2026 Southwest Monsoon pegs rainfall at 92 per cent (+-5 per cent) of the Long Period Average (LPA), indicating below-normal rainfall. ICRA noted that the mid-point estimate is the lowest first LRF in at least 25 years, compared to a range of 93-106 per cent of LPA seen earlier. This marks a sharp reversal from 2025 and 2024, when rainfall was above normal at 108 per cent of LPA.

Below-normal rainfall is expected to affect kharif crop sowing, which depends on monsoon rains between June and September. It may also limit reservoir replenishment, as water levels typically decline before the monsoon and recover during the season.

Global weather agencies have indicated a 62 per cent probability of El Niño developing between June and August 2026. El Niño conditions are usually associated with weaker monsoon rainfall in India.

Fertiliser availability for the upcoming kharif season is another concern. The ongoing West Asia conflict may disrupt supply chains, affecting both raw materials and finished products. ICRA said this could pose challenges for domestic production and require alternative sourcing to meet demand. *—ANI*

IMD heatwave forecast to boost soft drink firms' revenue

A hotter-than-usual summer forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is set to lift revenues for soft drink bottlers this fiscal, even as rising costs and intensifying competition are expected to put pressure on margins, according to Crisil Ratings. The summer months account for about 40 per cent of annual soft drink sales, and IMD has predicted above-normal temperatures. The possibility of El Niño, which typically prolongs summers, could further boost consumption. Crisil's analysis of 13 bottlers across carbonated soft drinks (70 per cent of the market), juices (12 per cent), and packaged water (18 per cent) indicates that the industry is well-prepared for the demand surge. *—ANI*

Haldiram's fined ₹ 20,000 for selling expired sweets to man

FARIDABAD, 15 MARCH

consumer forum here has ordered food company Haldiram Marketing Private Limited to pay more than Rs 20,000 in damages to a customer for selling expired sweets, saying it was "guilty of deficiency in service and unfair trade practices".

The incident took place on 21 December, 2025 when Nimish Agarwal, a resident of Faridabad, went to a Haldiram's outlet in Sector 16 to purchase sweets. Agarwal alleged that the salesman, under the pretext of billing, sent him to the first floor and attempted to pack the expired sweets. When he demanded the original box, the salesperson refused to give it to him and even tore the box to conceal the manufacturing and expiry dates. After this, when interrupted, instead of apologising, the staff behaved with him very rudely, Agarwal alleged. Agarwal filed a complaint with the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission in Sector 12, saying the sweets sold to him were manufactured on 12 December, 2025, and had an expiry date of 19 December, 2025. However, the Commission rejected the company's claim in the face of photographs, videos, and evidence of torn cans presented by the complainant through advocate Prithvi Raj Agarwal *—PTI*

MI are desperate to resurrect against PBKS

MI have not gone full throttle in the powerplay

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

A struggling Mumbai Indians will be desperate to resurrect their Indian Premier League campaign while bracing for Rohit Sharma's possible absence against a rampant Punjab Kings here on Thursday.

Rohit hobbled off the pitch after hurting his hamstring during MI's previous clash against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here last Sunday.

While it remains to be seen if the former skipper is available for the must-win clash, the Mumbai Indians would nevertheless need a collective effort to come out of the mire they are in. For a squad which promised to have all bases covered before the IPL began, the Mumbai Indians have largely had an underwhelming campaign, even after they won their tournament opener for the first time in 13 seasons. Since their most recent loss, the MI camp can be trusted to have gone back to the drawing board to overcome their power-play woes, which have been one of the biggest factors so far. Including a

rain-truncated game against the Rajasthan Royals, which had 3.2 overs of powerplay, the Mumbai Indians have taken a mere three wickets in the crucial phase of the first six overs in four matches.

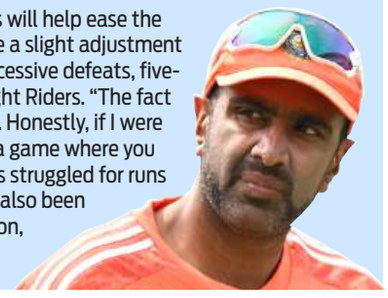
Jasprit Bumrah has been spot-on when it comes to containing, but the Indian pace ace has surprisingly gone wicketless in four matches so far. With a seam bowling attack which also has the experienced Trent Boult and Hardik Pandya, the returns have been minimal. Even with the bat, MI have not gone full throttle in the powerplay, where some of the on-song teams have tried to make the most of the field restrictions to give their teams a launching pad. For Mumbai, the inability to accelerate early on has invariably pushed a chunk of pressure on the middle-order, including Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma, who too have largely disappointed.

Rohit Sharma doubtful

Mumbai Indians opener Rohit Sharma is a doubtful participant in his team's IPL 2026 home game against Punjab Kings, to be played on Wednesday, due to an injury. Rohit had hurt his hamstring while batting during MI's clash against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Sunday. After receiving on-ground treatment, he had tried to soldier on. —*PTI*

Ashwin calls for a slight tweak in Gaikwad's batting approach

Former India off-spinner R Ashwin believes Chennai Super Kings' back-to-back wins will help ease the pressure on skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, while also urging the out-of-form opener to make a slight adjustment to his approach at the start of his innings. After opening their campaign with three successive defeats, five-time champions CSK have bounced back with wins over Delhi Capitals and Kolkata Knight Riders. "The fact that he's got a couple of wins as a captain should really ease him into this tournament. Honestly, if I were sitting in the dugout or if I were Ruturaj Gaikwad, I wouldn't be too fussed. T20 is a game where you need to show intent constantly," Ashwin said on JioStar. Gaikwad, however, has struggled for runs at the top, managing just 63 in five games, with a high score of 28. There has also been growing chatter around young Ayush Mhatre opening alongside Sanju Samson, with the skipper potentially moving down to No. 3.



Dhoni's hand in Noor Ahmad's match-winning spell

CHENNAI, 15 APRIL

Spinner Noor Ahmad's match-winning spell against Kolkata Knight Riders followed a lengthy conversation with Chennai Super Kings icon M S Dhoni in the nets.

The left-arm wrist spinner from Afghanistan ended with figures of three for 21 in four overs, accounting for wickets of Ajinkya Rahane, Rinku Singh, and Cameron Green in the middle overs to set up CSK's 32-run win. Up till Monday night, Noor had yet to make an impact in the ongoing tournament, having taken a solitary wicket in four games.

On a pitch offering a little bit of help, Noor was able to get on top of the batters. He got rid of Green with a quicker one into the stumps that Australia failed to connect with. CSK assistant coach Sridharan Sriram spoke about the work Noor had put in heading into the game and the chat with Dhoni, who has not been in action yet this season due to a calf strain. "I think it was good, the wicket helped today, there was a little bit of boredom for him. The other wickets were quite flat. Today, he was a little bit slower through the air. There was more side spin on the ball, and there was more drop. So that's something he's been working on. —*PTI*

MY BODY TELLING ME TO STOP

Viktor announces retirement

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Two-time Olympic and world champion Danish badminton great Viktor Axelsen announced his retirement on Wednesday, saying that his injury-ravaged body has told him to "stop".

The 32-year-old has not competed since October last year due to a back problem, which had needed surgery and left him in chronic pain.

"As most people know, I have been struggling with my back for quite some time. After I had surgery in April last year and went through a long rehabilitation process, I unfortunately had a setback in October," Axelsen, a three-time European champion, told 'Badminton Europe'.

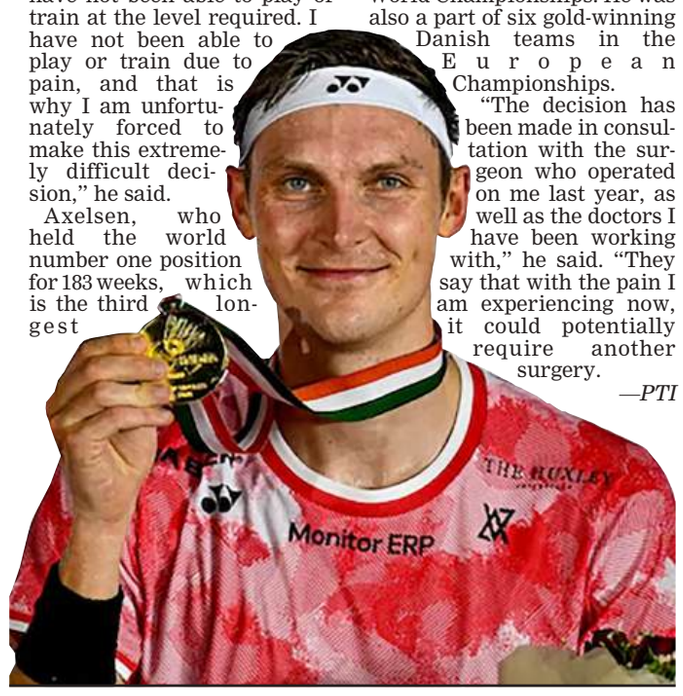
"Since those tournaments, I have not been able to play or train at the level required. I have not been able to play or train due to pain, and that is why I am unfortunately forced to make this extremely difficult decision," he said.

Axelsen, who held the world number one position for 183 weeks, which is the third longest run of all time, said that with the pain not subsiding and doctors warning him of another surgery if he continued, he finally had to listen to his body.

> **Badminton will remember Axelsen as one of the greatest to ever play the game**
>
> -Indian shuttler, Lakshya Sen

The affable Dane, who has managed asthma throughout his career, won consecutive gold medals at the Tokyo and Paris Olympics and finished on top in the 2017 and 2022 World Championships. He was also a part of six gold-winning Danish teams in the European Championships.

"The decision has been made in consultation with the surgeon who operated on me last year, as well as the doctors I have been working with," he said. "They say that with the pain I am experiencing now, it could potentially require another surgery. —*PTI*



Real Madrid great Jose Santamaria dies at 96

MADRID, 15 APRIL

Real Madrid defender José Emilio Santamaría, a Uruguayan who won four European Cups as part of the club's golden generation of players from the 1950s and 1960s before becoming coach of Spain, has died at age 96."Santamaría will always be remembered as one of the great symbols of our club," Madrid president Florentino Perez said in a statement on Wednesday. The cause of death was not made public. Born on 31 July 1929, in Montevideo, Santamaría joined Madrid in 1957. He helped it win European Cups in 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1966, playing alongside such legends as Alfredo Di Stefano and Ferenc Puskas..—*PTI*

AFC Asian Cup 2027 draw rescheduled to 9 May

QATAR, 15 APRIL

The draw for the AFC Asian Cup 2027 will be held in Saudi Arabia next month, the officials of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said on Wednesday, after being postponed when the Middle East war broke out. The draw was supposed to take place on 11 April in Riyadh, but the event was moved "to ensure the full participation of all key stakeholders and participating member associations", the AFC said. It will now be held on May 9 at the historic At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Kuala Lumpur-based federation said. The 19th edition of the Asian Cup is scheduled to take place from 7 January to February 5 next year, and 23 out of 24 participating nations have been confirmed.—*PTI*

IPL 2026: RCB VS LSG

Lucknow Super Giants' Rishabh Pant, retired hurt vs RCB in Bengaluru –*PTI*

UPBEAT EAST BENGAL GEARS UP FOR BENGALURU TEST

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

East Bengal FC will look to continue its winning momentum when it hosts a strong Bengaluru FC in an ISL-12 fixture at the Salt Lake Stadium on Thursday.

East Bengal heads into the contest high on confidence after a convincing 3-1 away win over Chennaiyin FC. The Kolkata giant will aim to build on that performance and secure another positive result at home to bolster its title chances.

Meanwhile, Bengaluru FC will be eager to bounce back after suffering a defeat to Kerala Blasters FC in its previous outing. That loss halted its recent progress, and the team will now be targeting crucial points to get back in the championship race.

Both sides are currently level on 14 points, but East Bengal holds a slight edge in fourth place due to a superior goal difference. Bengaluru, having played one match more (eight compared to East Bengal's seven), faces added pressure to deliver in this encounter. —*PTI*

Carlos Alcaraz is Infosys Global Brand Ambassador

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

IT services company Infosys on Wednesday announced it has signed up seven-time Grand Slam Champion Carlos Alcaraz as its global brand ambassador.

Further, Infosys - leveraging Infosys Topaz, an AI-first offering powered by generative and agentic AI technologies - will now work with Alcaraz and his coaching team to develop an AI-powered match analytics and a personalised performance application to aid match preparation and in-game strategy.

Beyond the court, the partnership also extends to joint initiatives between Infosys and the Carlos Alcaraz Foundation to leverage technology to drive social impact, focusing on tech-for-good initiatives. In an era where the difference between a champion and the next best is separated by a small margin, tennis is a perfect embodiment of that fierce competitiveness, where data and insight-driven expertise can tilt that margin favorably.

Leveraging Infosys Topaz, an AI-first offering powered by generative and agentic AI technologies, Infosys will now work with Alcaraz and his coaching team to develop an AI-powered match analytics and a personalized performance application to aid match preparation and in-game strategy. —*PTI*

Paris Saint-Germain beats Liverpool at Anfield to reach SFs

LIVERPOOL, 15 APRIL

Paris Saint-Germain's grip on the Champions League trophy remains strong.

The defending champion advanced to the semifinals of European club soccer's biggest competition by dumping out six-time winner Liverpool on Tuesday night.

A 2-0 win at Anfield sealed a 4-0 aggregate victory and moved PSG a step closer to becoming only the second club to retain the trophy in the modern era after all-time king of Europe Real Madrid.

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Debele scored two second-half goals to kill off Liverpool's fight and book a semifinal clash against either Bayern Munich or Madrid.

Also, on Tuesday, Atletico Madrid advanced to the semifinals after a 3-2 aggregate win over Barcelona.

PSG is out to make history after ending its long wait to conquer Europe for the first time last year. It is the second

time in as many seasons that the French giant has knocked out Liverpool, which was in search of another famous Champions League comeback and dominated PSG for periods.

Van Dijk says PSG 'deserved' semifinal spot

Virgil van Dijk had no complaints after Liverpool was knocked out of the Champions League by title-holder Paris Saint-Germain in a defeat compounded by a serious injury to Hugo Ekitike.

Ousmane Dembele's double sealed a 2-0 quarterfinal second-leg win for PSG against an outclassed Liverpool on Tuesday night.

Six-time European champion Liverpool was, however, still fortunate to be in the tie after escaping from last week's first leg at the Parc des Princes with just a 2-0 defeat after entering what Reds manager Arne Slot labelled "survival mode". —*PTI*

ATP: Ben sinks Blockx to reach Munich quarters

PARIS, 15 APRL

American second seed Ben Shelton is through to the quarter-finals of the ATP event in Munich after beating Belgian Alexander Blockx 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old Belgian wildcard, ranked 72nd in the world, pushed the world number six deep into a second-set tie-break, but Shelton dug in to hold him at bay and secure victory in just over one hour and 45 minutes.

Shelton, who blasted four aces and saved three of three break points across the match, will face Brazilian rising star Joao Fonseca in the last eight.

The American is still chasing a first clay court title, having lost the final in Munich last year to Alexander Zverev.

Three-time champion Zverev, who is again the top seed on home soil, faces Canadian Gabriel Diallo in their last-16 clash.

Earlier on Wednesday, French world number 26 and

seventh seed Arthur Rinderknech was eliminated by Fonseca 6-3, 6-2.

The 19-year-old Brazilian, who also beat Rinderknech in Monte Carlo earlier in April, prevailed in one hour and 21 minutes. —*PTI*

NZ qualifies for FIFA Women's WC 2027

WELLINGTON, 15 APRL

New Zealand will play at next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in Brazil after beating Papua New Guinea 1-0 on Wednesday in the final of the Oceania Confederation Qualifying Series.

Sunderland midfielder Katie Kitching scored the only goal of the match in the 55th minute, sending New Zealand to a World Cup for the seventh time.

Papua New Guinea still has a chance to qualify through an intercontinental playoff during the international window in November or December.

New Zealand was denied twice by VAR, four times by

the woodwork, and repeatedly by Papua New Guinea goalkeeper Betty Sam, who was outstanding in a hard-working defence.

Deven Jackson appeared to have scored from Rebecca Stott's through ball in the 32nd minute, but the VAR showed Jackson had been caught by PNG's offside trap.

JOBURG LADIES OPEN

Diksha leads group of five Indians

JOHANNESBURG, 15 APRIL

Golfer Diksha Dagar will spearhead a five-member Indian contingent at the Joburg Ladies Open, co-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour and the Sunshine Ladies Tour, starting here on Thursday.

Diksha, currently in the top 10 of the LET's Order of Merit with two top-10 finishes from six starts, will be joined by fellow Indians Avani Prashanth, Pranavi Urs, Hitaashee Bakshi, and Tvesa Malik, a former winner on the Sunshine Ladies Tour. Making her debut in South Africa, Hitaashee has rediscovered form after four missed cuts, finishing tied ninth at the Australian WPGA Championship, the fourth event of the Australian swing.

Avani, after a good rookie season in 2025, has had a modest season with three cuts in five starts, but her best finish has been a tied-39th at the PIF Saudi Ladies International at the start of the season.

Tvesa, who lost her card last season, will be making her first LET start in 2026, and a good week will give her confidence for the upcoming Investec Women's South African Open at Royal Cape.

Tvesa will be the first Indian to tee off alongside Ana Dawn of the Isle of Man and Kaiyuree Moodley of South Africa, while Pranavi will play with Emma Spitz of Austria and Marta Martin of Spain. Diksha will tee off with Luna Sobron Galmes of Spain. Avani plays with Alice Hewson of England and Patricie Mackova of the Czech Republic, and Hitaashee has been grouped with Alexandra Försterling and England's Annabell Fuller.

There will be a lot of focus on local golfer Casandra Alexander as the Order of Merit leader goes in pursuit of a popular home win. Casandra has made a hot start to 2026 on the LET season, picking up four top-six finishes, including two runners-up spots, to lead the season-long standings. —*PTI*